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PROPHETS OF THE DAWN

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AMOS, HOSEA, ISAIAH, MICAH

The Beginnings of the Religion of the Spirit

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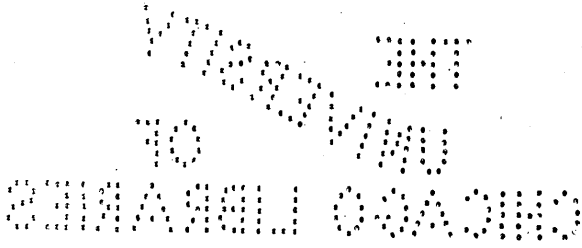

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I

THE BACKGROUND

I

THE BACKGROUND

IF the question were put to any of us: "What is the most important era in the history of religion?" there can be little or no doubt as to the answer. Christians certainly, and many who know Christianity even though they do not profess its faith, would answer that the most important time in the history of religion is found in the opening years of the present era—the years in which Jesus Christ and His followers set the new revelation at work and the light of it shining among men.

But if that question were followed by another: "What period ranks next in importance?" there might be differences of judgment and opinion. Some might champion the time when Moses brought Israel out of Egypt, and laid the foundations of the Hebrew nation; others the period when David founded the Hebrew state; still others the time when Jeremiah, in the tragic and lurid light of an oncom-

ing storm, saw God's truth in lightning flashes. Someone might speak of the time of the exile, with its noble fruitage in the book of Job and the latter part of the book of Isaiah, when the idea of vicarious suffering, the greatest truth that ever dawned within the soul of man, received its first clear and noble expression. And here and there an ultra-Protestant might venture to set the period of the Reformation in this second position of importance.

But some of us have an answer ready which is none of these; and we are confident that it is right. For, without the period we have in mind, it is difficult to see how many of these great epochs could have taken shape. It is hard to see how Jeremiah, or the Great Prophet of the exile, or the leaders of the Reformation, could ever have seen the truth as they saw it, or proclaimed it as they made it known, had not certain men, in the eighth century before Christ appeared, laid the foundations on which all after leaders built. Indeed, "humanly speaking" (and since we are human, how else can we speak, unless, following a celebrated example, we speak like asses?), humanly speaking, it is hard to see how Jesus could have

taught as He did, thought as He did, done what He did, had not the great prophets of eight hundred years before His time first brought their messages. What we think of today as essential religion first took clear and definite shape there in Palestine, somewhere between the years 765 B. C. and 700 B. C. There we first detect the presence of the living germ that has developed into Christianity and Protestantism.

Sabatier has made a well-known and much-used distinction between "Religions of Authority" and "The Religion of the Spirit." The eighth century before Christ was distinguished by the dawning of the Religion of the Spirit.

There were forerunners, of course. There always are. God's most sudden growths always have their roots in the past. He produces by growth, not by magic. Christianity had its John the Baptist, and the Reformation its Wiclif. In the preparation for the wonderful outburst of prophecy in the eighth century, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, all had their part. Without them, Amos and his followers would have been different, if they had come at all. But about these earlier leaders and their

messages there is more or less of dimness and uncertainty. It is hard to get clear outlines of them or of their ideas. Moses is immense and majestic, but shadowy to all who do not uncritically accept as his that which later ages read back into his character and work. Of all these mighty men of God we cannot help suspecting that they, and their words, have been dressed up by men of later times.

But the men of the eighth century wrote. We have their words, and can catch their very thoughts and ideas. They were the first of the writing prophets. And they saw God and religion and life and the essential principles of things with a clear vision such as no one had had before, and few have had since. They saw the Dawn of the Spirit, and we see it in their immortal little books.

There were four of them. They were close together in time and space. They form a cluster, as do the poets of the Victorian era. Indeed, there are faint but real resemblances to Carlyle, Browning, Tennyson, and Arnold, in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Their messages were similar. Each had his own point of view, his own part to play, his own

attitude, his own emphasis. We can trace no dependence of the one on the other. Of each of them the ultimate explanation is that "There was a man sent from God, whose name was"—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah. But, independent as they were, each of the others, there is a surprising unity of mind and spirit underlying their varying messages.

In the first chapter, we try to recover their background, that the men themselves and their messages may stand out the more clearly against it. What of their place, their time, the conditions under which they lived? We may believe strongly that conditions do not shape men, that men rather shape conditions; but the conditions in the midst of which one works or speaks have a powerful influence over deeds and words. Even Jesus would not have been just the same, had He come into a different environment.

A considerable amount of religious value may be found in studying a map of Palestine, or, better, in a careful use of that rich mine of information and inspiration, George Adam Smith's *Geography of the Holy Land.*

The very name "Palestine" is suggestive.

It reminds us that Israel was not the only dweller in the land. It is surprising that the Philistines, named in the Bible only as fierce foes of the people of God, have given the common name to the Holy Land. Nine times out of ten today it is referred to as "Palestine," which is no more nor less than "the land of the Philistines." Here surely is the irony of fate.

The land lay like a link between East and West, between old and new, between mighty contending empires. It united two great continents, even as it held together two eras, with their contrasting civilizations and religions.

Africa, Asia, Europe; Palestine is near to them all. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece; they lie round about her; their armies marched over her fields and invested her cities. Such a land could not dwell apart. It was swept along the main currents of history.

Yet it was a small country. It might dream of universal empire, but always it would remain a dream. It would have slight temptation to strive after world-dominion,—that fatal ambition that has wrecked mighty nations, or given them over to the curse and blight of

militarism. Israel, from its position, a small nation set in the midst of world-events, was fitted for the rôle of critic and observer, rather than for that of contender in the arena. The whole country of the Hebrews is only about one hundred and twenty miles long—less than the distance from New York to Albany. It was but a few miles wide; a fertile strip lying between deserts and the sea.

Yet this tiny country was surprisingly varied in character. Its altitude ranged from the snows of Mount Hermon to the Dead Sea, below sea level. It had its fertile plains, its sandy patches, its rocky barrens. It knew the sea, mountains, plains, rivers, lakes, valleys, deserts, gardens. It would be hard to find anywhere on earth another spot so limited in area and so rich in contrasts. It was a land unusually dependent on "nature," on the capricious action of nature. Rainfall or lack of it might mean life or death. It was natural in such a country to look for miracles.

In this extraordinary country God set a marvellous people. One of the four prophets we are studying expressed keenly some of the strong characteristics of his race. He set in

an unforgettable phrase the strange combination that marked the descendants of Jacob, the union of business shrewdness with mysticism: "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he had power with God." They must needs be shrewd to make a living among their fierce and overbearing neighbours. But more than any other people the world has ever known, they had an unquenchable appetite for religion, an instinct to look through facts to ideals, through the outward to the spiritual. They grew, morally and spiritually, from crude standards of conduct and childish thoughts of God to the noblest ethics and the purest religion man has known or will ever know. Their course was marked by many sins, shameful backslidings, lamentable retrogressions. Yet we might not see their faults and sins so clearly, had they not, with their passion for facts as they are, written of their sins so unsparingly and with such fidelity to truth. Never did the glory of a hero blind them to his vices or defects. Of what other people can that be said? How the sinlessness of Jesus shines out against such a background of relentless truth-telling!

At the period we are discussing, this little race in its tiny country was split into two kingdoms. Sometimes we forget that this condition of disunity was normal for Israel. After all, they were united only for a few years, under David and Solomon. There were revolts aplenty while David was on the throne, springing in large part from the natural jealousy of section against section. "What part have we in the son of Jesse?" cried the Northerners, jealous of the power of a Southern monarch. Solomon faced revolts and insurrections. No sooner was his wise, strong rule over (not wise enough or strong enough to avoid tyranny and exploitation, or to avert their natural heritage of rebellion) than the nation broke asunder, never to be reunited save under very different conditions at a far later time.

Strong contrasts appear as we view the two little kingdoms side by side. They have their bearing on our four prophets and their messages. The Southern Kingdom, which we commonly call Judah, had the capital city, Jerusalem, the Davidic dynasty, the Davidic ideal, the priestly tradition and cultus. This made for stability and conservatism. The

Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, or Ephraim, had no such anchors to hold it. It was larger in area and in population, more varied in character of country and of people, far more fruitful, far more open to attack, far less homogeneous in the character of its population. It was also more free in its political life. To a certain degree, it was more democratic, politically and socially. The South felt the influence of aristocracy, the North of plutocracy. Upstarts and *nouveaux riches* had a better chance in Ephraim than in Judah.

The North was freer in manners and sentiments, less bound by tradition, looser in religion, more intellectual, more artistic, more brilliant, more restless. We might almost say of the government of Israel what was said of the government of Russia under the régime of the Tsars, that it was "a despotism tempered by assassination." Small wonder that the Turkish rulers of Syria proscribed the books of the Kings, as tales of how people rebelled, and rulers were put out of the way. It was easier to "start things" in the North than in the South. The line of David was supplanted but once in the long history of the Southern

Kingdom, and then it was re-established after a few years. In the North, one dynasty succeeded another with bewildering rapidity, and no one cared very much.

Israel was larger and wealthier than Judah. But it lay exposed to invaders, while Judah had its defences among the rocks. The troops of Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria overran Israel far more readily than Judah, which tempted them less with its possessions, and offered more serious threats of resistance.

We shall understand better the messages of these prophets, if we get well in mind the names of the neighbouring nations, and their locations; Syria (sometimes called Aram, or Damascus), the strongest of them all, lying on the north; on the west, Phenicia (Tyre and Sidon), a nation of traders and seagoers; Philistia further south, close to the borders of Judah, an unpleasant neighbour, ever ready to take advantage; Egypt far away to the south-west, yet not too remote to influence profoundly the political and social life of these smaller peoples; wandering hordes of Amalekites in the desert to the south; then Edom, secure amid the rocks, an enemy of peculiar

malignity; on the east Ammon and Moab, more closely akin than the rest to the Hebrews; Hamath, also, a shadowy but powerful kingdom to the northward. Poltically, socially, above all religiously, these surrounding peoples had considerable influence upon the Hebrew nations. Their presence gave a tinge and flavour to all the thinking and conduct of Israel and Judah.

Just at the time these four prophets appeared, the life of both kingdoms was marked by extraordinary prosperity and apparent strength and security. Never had they been more rich or powerful, unless in the time of Solomon. We may well note the evidence in this fact to the truth stated by George Adam Smith in his commentary on Joel, that religion flourishes best not in times of poverty, but in times of a reasonable prosperity, of material well-being, well-diffused.

This prosperity and security may be accounted for by several reasons.

There were external causes which counted for much. Egypt was weak, too weak to attempt much interference with neighbouring nations. Assyria was distracted by internal

strife. The strength of Syria had been decisively broken. No strong enemies appeared on any hand. Good feeling prevailed between the two Israelitish kingdoms.

Internally, also, conditions were favourable to peace and prosperity. In each of the two countries a strong, able monarch was on the throne. Jeroboam II ruled over Israel. He was the grandson of Jehu. The dynasty had lasted long enough to give an unwonted feeling of assurance and stability. Jeroboam was one of the best and ablest kings the Northern Kingdom had known. He had extended the natural boundaries, fostered trade, protected the people, especially the merchants. He had built up and encouraged the external institutions of religion. We find allusions, in the literature of the time, to ivory couches, soft cushions, rich draperies, fine houses, luxurious divans, rare liquors, rich food, lavish spending, careless luxury, popular music and entertainment.

In Judah, Uzziah, or Azariah, was on the throne. He was one of the best of kings. Wise and strong, firm and bold, he fortified Jerusalem, fostered agriculture, developed the

farms and vineyards, encouraged trade, sent caravans to Elath and ships to distant points, perhaps to India, whence they brought back strange treasures, peacocks, monkeys, parrots, as well as gold, ivory, silks, and gems.

Here, as well as in the North, might be found great luxury and material prosperity. Not since the days of the great son of David had Jerusalem been so splendid or money so abundant. There grew up a "business class," here as in the North a "plutocracy," that threatened to rival in social importance and prestige the ancient hereditary aristocracy.

During a considerable part of his reign, Uzziah was a leper. His son, Jotham, was the ostensible ruler for the last sixteen years or so of Uzziah's life. But one suspects that, leper though he was, Uzziah was the real ruler. The laws with regard to lepers were by no means so severely restrictive or so rigidly enforced then as they were at a later period. Uzziah, though forced to dwell in separate quarters, and not seen much in public, seems to have kept affairs under his strong and skilful control to the end of his days.

So the two little countries were flourishing,

each under what nowadays would be called "a good business administration."

Socially, conditions were far less satisfactory,—as not infrequently happens in a period of government-fostered prosperity. A few reaped most of the advantages of the new wealth. There developed a rich class and a poor class, with a widening chasm between. The old order was changing, and not wholly for the better. Men were crowding to the cities, farms were being bought up to form large estates for wealthy owners. There were many abuses and evils that flourished in the shadow of the wonderful prosperity. We find evidence of unrest, of the growth of resentment, class feeling, and even of what today we call "radicalism." Plainly in evidence was what someone has well dubbed, "The unconscious insolence of conscious wealth." High standards of luxury led to rising prices.

There was much oppression of the poor, exploitation of them by unscrupulous or thoughtless leaders of enterprises. Profiteering was rampant. There are few who can suddenly gain power and not abuse it. The

literature of the period reveals painful and sordid conditions of oppression of the poor, as we shall see.

Among the social problems of the time the Land Problem stood out as peculiarly glaring and difficult. "Woe to them that join house to house, till they dwell alone in the midst of the land," cries one of the social critics of the time. The same problem confronted Rome, and confronts Russia and Great Britain today. The Land Question is a burning question, has burned its way down through the ages like a forest fire that cannot be put out. The writer recently visited a part of the South where a few years ago the peach-raising industry seemed successful and stable. Now it is seriously crippled, through the coming in of wealthy people, who have bought vast acreages, planted immense orchards, and then, growing tired after a few years, have neglected their holdings. So it was in Israel and Judah. The original owners of small thrifty farms sold them, drifted to the cities, or became hired workers on the very farms they originally owned. All the evils of absentee landlordism, and some of the evils of corporate ownership

and administration, had begun to raise their ugly heads.

Other modern problems confronted that ancient time,—the problem of intemperance in drink, the problem of sexual vice. Overdrinking and sensuality existed to an extent that alarmed the serious-minded. Conditions were worse in the Northern Kingdom, than in Judah; for there looser standards of social morality, a freer attitude as to sex relations, and the lighter hold of religious institutions and customs combined to foster the growth of vice and intemperance. Shameful things were tolerated in the very shrines and temples. Incredible as it seems to us, prostitution formed a recognized part of the customary procedure at the religious centres. This was true in Jerusalem in the worship of Jehovah, as in the more eclectic religion of Ephraim. The name for "holy woman" or "devotee" is the same as for "prostitute." This condition, though restricted no doubt to small dimensions in Jerusalem, lasted nevertheless down to the time of Josiah, shortly before the destruction of the city and the exile. The pure religion of Jehovah had to wage a hard and

stern fight against the influences flowing in from the Canaanitish cultus. Sometimes there seemed little to choose between Baal and the conventional Jehovah of common worship.

There was godlessness and irreligion that grew apace. A wave of materialism flooded the land. Superstition was wild and rank in its growth. Foreign fads and cults abounded and flourished. There was much respect for outward ceremonies and for the conventional institutions and customs of established religion, coupled with moral laxity and practical scepticism.

In all this it is easy to note certain resemblances to conditions in our own time, which makes the study of these men and their messages take on practical importance and value.

The religious conditions of the time form a very interesting study. One's views and conclusions are influenced somewhat by his general point of view as to the validity of historical criticism, and of the reconstruction of Biblical history made by the critics.

One who still clings to the conviction that all the legislation in the four books Exodus,

Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy comes from Moses, with a special and direct divine sanction, will find quite untenable the picture of religious conditions about to be given. But, without entering into any argument or debate, it is sufficient to state that many of the best historical students now hold, and that the position appears to many Christians quite compatible with their Christian faith, that comparatively little of "the law" came in detailed, precise form from Moses; that the system of ceremonial, moral and social regulations so fully set forth in the opening books of the Bible, was a growth through many centuries, put together finally in its present shape rather late in the life of the Hebrew people, probably after their return from the exile. One can imagine a rough analogy, if somehow there had been put together a collection of documents,—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, Washington's Farewell Address, certain papers from *The Federalist,* and a number of Acts of Congress and decisions of the Courts, the whole forming a fairly full and connected summary of American law and precedent; and that, in recogni-

tion of the outstanding name in our national history, the whole production should have been called " The Book of Washington." From the point of view of sound historical criticism, the " Books of Moses " may be held to bear some such relation to that great leader in the early life of Israel.

In the law of Israel there are two clearly distinguishable elements, dealing with separate parts of the nation's developing religion and life. They are the *Cultus* and the *Mishpat,* or the Ceremonial Law and the Moral Law.

Which is the earlier? Which can be more surely traced back to Moses and to the origins of the Hebrew nation? It seems clear to some of us that Moses gave very little of the Cultus. That was largely influenced by Canaanitish rites and religious forms and feelings, or was the natural heritage of the Hebrew people along with many other peoples of the time. Certain references in Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah clearly suggest this. There is much to warrant the belief that the great distinctive gift of Moses was what the Israelites called the " Mishpat," what we would call the " common law," the statement of human rights con-

tained in regulations for conduct, intercourse, and social life. Israel's original distinction among the nations may well have been that in its life essential justice had a clearer and stronger expression, and was made of more importance.

It is possible, some think it very likely, that the priest played small part in religion according to Moses, and that the elaborate regulations for priestly religion are of decidedly later date. But in the developing life of Israel the priest gradually grew in power, as priests have a way of doing, and liked to trace back to the beginning all his authorities and institutions, as priests have a way of doing. Dean Hodges' caution is a maxim of value: "The priest must always be watched."

In the Northern Kingdom the priest never had such concentrated power as in Judah. Conditions in Ephraim made for the lingering on of the old village shrines, with their separate priesthoods and traditions. It was in the Southern Kingdom that priestcraft flourished. Judah, beginning as a monarchy, ended as a hierocracy. We find embedded in the history of Judah fossil-indications of a conflict between

the king and the priest. Ending as it did in the complete victory of the priesthood, it is natural that the records, put in shape by priests at the time of their complete domination of the national life, should soften somewhat the lines of the conflict, and give the impression of an authority and divine sanction for the priesthood reaching back to the remotest times.

It was just about at the eighth century B. C. that the conflict between Church and state, between the priest and the king, came to its head. Here, one must confess, the imagination must be given play. Yet there is a good sound basis of fact on which the imagination may work.

There are indications which may warrant the view that at first, in the life of the Hebrew people, the king was supreme in religion as in political affairs. If Samuel anointed the first king, it was as a prophet, and not as a priest that he did so. And the king had his way in the appointment of priests. David made and unmade priests with considerable freedom. He and his son offered sacrifices. There seems to have been no doubt or question in that early day that the king was supreme in religion. Our Lord showed His unerring insight

into facts of the past when He set "what David did" over against what the priests taught and what the law said, as the older and truer authority.

But more and more, in the city which David founded, and in the temple which Solomon built, there grew up a compact, powerful priesthood. They became authoritative interpreters of the law. Can we wonder if, unconsciously, they interpreted it in the interest of their own order?

We make a serious mistake when we think of these priests of Judah as scholars, recluses, clergymen. Dean Stanley, in a striking passage, well reminds us that their chief business was the butchery of animals, and that physical competency was a prime necessity of their equipment. Given leaders, they would form a powerful party in political life. And the leaders came.

It is intensely interesting to look at the history of Judah just before the appearance of the prophetic group in the eighth century B. C. Athaliah, the unscrupulous kinswoman and counterpart of Jezebel, seized the throne. She was a Baal-worshipper, and loyalty to Jehovah

joined with loyalty to the Davidic line in opposition to her. The successful revolution was led by a priest, with priests to assist. For some years the youthful king was wholly under the sway of the priests. Then he broke away, supported by the nobles, and the son of Jehoiada, the priestly leader of the revolution, was stoned. Is it hard to read in these facts evidence of a growing antagonism between nobles and priests?

Following these events, we read that two kings in succession were assassinated, each as the result of a conspiracy. It is significant that in each instance the king had made use of the temple treasure in a national emergency.

Then came Uzziah. There is a very interesting note with regard to his coronation to the effect that "all the people took Uzziah and made him king." One wonders if this marks a revolt against the growing power of the priests, a check on their tendency to control.

Uzziah came into conflict with the priests. He claimed the right to offer sacrifices, as David and Solomon had done without protest. His right was disputed. The High Priest resisted the monarch, claiming that he was

infringing on the exclusive rights of the priesthood. Just at that time, the king was found to be a leper. The priests naturally made full use of this fact, presenting it as proof that Jehovah sustained their claims. Doubtless the king himself adopted that explanation. There are two accounts of the matter. The one in the earlier document (II Kings 15:5) says only that Jehovah smote the king with leprosy. The later account (11 Chronicles 6:15 *ff.*) goes into details in accounting for the disease by his arrogant assumption of priestly functions. The hand of the priestly compiler of the later book seems evident here.

We can scarcely understand these prophets and their messages, unless we take in and give full weight to this growing power and influence of the priesthood and the cultus. At the time these men came forth from God there was a rapidly growing tendency to identify "religion" with ceremonies and sacrifices, which was, in fact, a retrogression or a departure from the simpler ethical conceptions of the earlier days and their teachers and leaders.

Such are the conditions amid which these great men of God appeared. The conditions

did not produce the men. But they shaped them and their messages, and gave them occasion.

They appeared just when an era of almost unprecedented prosperity was drawing to an end, though few or none saw the gathering clouds. They came when social unrest was growing, due to the growing exploitation of the poor by the rich, when luxury was producing its crop of vice and irreligion, when religion itself tended to grow ever more formal, outward, and self-seeking.

Then came these four men, with the living word of the Living God.

Did they ever meet? Did they see and hear each other? When we realize how near they were to one another in time and space, we can hardly doubt that they met. At least they met in soul. The light flashed from one to another. Amos, the first of them, appeared about 760, or 750. Hosea came about 745, Isaiah about 738, Micah about 722. Their words were spoken, their work done, within the short time of about forty years.

They lived near together. Isaiah, in Jerusalem, could reach Tekoa, the home of Amos, by

a short walk southward of about twelve miles. Twelve miles to the north lay Bethel, where Hosea probably lived. About fifteen miles due west was the village home of Micah. Draw a circle with a radius of fifteen miles, with Jerusalem at the centre, and the homes of these four men will be within it.

We know of no intercourse among them. But we readily imagine it. Whether or no they saw one another in the flesh, in the spirit they were one. And together they laid the foundations of the religion of the spirit, which is the final religion of the human race.

II

THE PIONEER: AMOS

II

THE PIONEER: AMOS

ONE who opens the book of Amos, with an adequate sense of what the man and his message mean in the spiritual life of mankind, must bow the head in reverence, feeling that he is standing on holy ground. Here first emerges in clear form and at a definite time that "Religion of the Spirit," the development of which has been the great achievement of the centuries, that pure religion which is still going on to deeper and higher realization. One feels as if he were watching the dawn among great mountain peaks.

Four mighty mountain tops stand in a group there in the eighth century before Christ. Each man played his own part, spoke his own message, did his own work. The four are impressive in their unlikenesses, but even more impressive is the underlying unity of spirit and purpose and point of view that marks the men and their messages.

If we are to give a title to each, we may venture to call Amos the Pioneer, Hosea the Poet, Isaiah the Statesman, and Micah the Tribune. These names are far from being accurate and adequate. All of them were seers. Isaiah and Micah were reformers. Isaiah was a poet, in many respects a greater poet than was Hosea. Yet on the whole these distinctive titles stand for the most important characteristics of the four men.

It is very interesting to notice that three of the four came from Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The explanation of this may lie in the simple historical fact that the Northern Kingdom collapsed suddenly and violently within a few years after the greatest of these prophets appeared. There was scant time for the appearance of other prophets before the disaster came; and such voices as may have been heard were swept out of remembrance in the general cataclysm. It may be that the purer religious conditions in Judah made for the appearance of more prophets there. Yet, on the other hand, the force of traditionalism and ecclesiasticism was very strong in the Southern Kingdom—a force always hostile to prophecy.

Perhaps the best explanation we can give is that the worship of Jehovah, the true and living God, existed in far purer form in the South than in the North; and the moral passion and spiritual fervour of these leaders sprang the more naturally from such soil. It is an interesting and impressive fact that, in all ages, while the true prophets have criticized the Church, attacked the Church, and suffered persecution and death at the hands of the Church, they have grown within the circle of Church's life and teaching, and have come forth from it to be its unwelcome leaders. It is out of the homes of religious folk that God brings the pioneers of new days and new movements in religion.

One title at least cannot be taken from Amos, nor can he be called upon to share the honour of it with another. It is the title of Pioneer. His voice was the first to break into the little religious world of the Palestine of that time with a new vibrant message that has not yet lost its power.

He comes upon the scene sometime between 765 and 745 B. C., probably nearer the earlier year. He dates his prophecies in the time of

Jeroboam and Uzziah. There is confusion as to the dates of that period in the record of the Books of the Kings. But we are quite sure that Uzziah died sometime between 740 and 738. Jeroboam probably died a few years before, perhaps as much as ten years before. That sets the year 745 as about the latest possible date for the appearance of Amos. In all likelihood he came ten or twenty years earlier.

It is significant, the position of this man in the social world of his time. In nothing does God more clearly show that He is "no respecter of persons" than in the way in which He summons His leaders from all ranks of life, over and over choosing the weak and despised to confound the mighty. We know very little about Amos, nothing at all except what we learn from hints he drops in the course of his writings. But we know that he came from the country, and that a poor country. He was a herdsman (Amos 1:1), and a dresser of sycamore trees. George Adam Smith finds in these items clear proof that he was a humble labourer in small and unimportant concerns. But those whose Divine Lord came from a carpenter's shop are not amazed that the pioneer

of the prophets of the spirit should have come from the farm, a rough, untaught man.

There is a bit of personal history imbedded in his writings (Amos 7:10 *ff.*). The priest Amaziah, speaking officially in the name of both church and state, contemptuously calls him a " seer," and bids him go back to his own country, intimating that he is prophesying as a means of money making. Amos indignantly replies that he is not a prophet, nor a prophet's son. It strikes us strangely, this refusal to be considered a prophet, coming from one of the men we esteem most worthy of that honoured name. But it was not an honoured name at that time. Amos' repudiation of the name is quite like the way in which a thoughtful, high-minded layman who should speak out about religious conditions in some haunt of backward, superstitious religion, would protest, " I'm no priest," should someone give him that title. There seems to have been a band, or order, of professional " prophets;" they existed in the time of Samuel and Saul; we find them again at the time of Elijah; we catch glimpses of them here and there through the history of Israel; and always they seem numer-

ous, noisy, and professional. Sometimes they are scarcely more than fortune-tellers, "medicine men," akin to Hindu fakirs, or Arab dervishes, exponents of magic mysteries rather than of moral ideals. Amos would not for a moment let anyone suppose that he was of this guild of the "sons of the prophets." His protest reminds us of the story of the very earnest man who was introduced as "The orator of the evening," and emphatically replied, "I'm no orator; I've got something to say." It was primarily because of what Amos and his compeers did and were that the name "prophet" was lifted out of its low place and set on high as one of the greatest titles a son of man can wear. Yet after all, the new and lofty meaning given to the word was a reversion to the type of Moses, who said that God would raise up true prophets like unto him. That prophecy was partially realized in the men of the eighth century, and gloriously fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Ecstasy, emotionalism, fanaticism,—these were the notes of the professional prophets. Such qualities are conspicuously lacking in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. In their

most exalted moments, they did not leave their minds or their consciences behind. Never were they more clear in reason and in ethics than at their highest moments of divine communion and revelation. Therein lay something of their new and perennial significance.

To this herdsman, this humble farm labourer, at work in Tekoa, a village a dozen miles south of Jerusalem, came an irresistible impulse to speak out the living word of the Living God.

We cannot help wishing that we knew more about the man, how his mind and soul grew. We feel very sure that he must have had some first-hand knowledge of the world of his day. He seems well acquainted with the history of his own people. And he knows also what is going on among other nations. We imagine him, from time to time, throwing his cloak about him, taking his staff, and going on long journeys, to Philistia, Phenicia, Syria, Egypt, perhaps even to Assyria. His is the first voice to be lifted in warning against the mighty empire of Assyria. His seems to be the first mind to discern that peril. The incredulity with which his hearers greet the message shows how

little comprehension they had of the facts and the forces which were so soon to overwhelm them.

Rough though the man was, he was highly intelligent, thoughtful, a man of penetrating insight, possessing a style in speaking and writing which anyone might envy, clear, incisive, and noble in its sweep, imagery, and intensity.

With a little play of the imagination we can see him uttering his great messages. He spoke once, twice, perhaps three or four times. His book is largely made up of condensed reports of such addresses.

Why did he go to the Northern Kingdom, rather than to his own people? The simplest explanation is that conditions were worse there, danger far more threatening and imminent. A true prophet, he went to the heart of the situation and spoke out where the need was greatest.

We see him appearing at Bethel, at a time when the crowds were assembling there for some festival, civic or religious, probably both; for the distinction was less sharply observed then than it is now. There are indications

that the king and court were there at the time. It is likely that a festival was in progress, something like a Country Fair. In those days pleasure and religion were combined, as indeed they are today in many places. The Feast of the Assumption is celebrated each year in Southern France with a parade, a flower show, a general holiday, and fireworks in the evening.

In some such scene, amid the strolling crowds, the vendors of cakes, wine, water, and various wares, the fortune tellers and magicians, the worshippers of Baal and of Jehovah, suddenly there stands forth this new figure, and all eyes are rivetted on him. Instinctively we picture him as Sargent has done, tall, big, muscular, swarthy, with black hair, a white burnoose, a rough figure, yet majestic.

His opening speech is a miracle of skill. Open your Bible and read the first and second chapters of his prophecy. How better could he have caught and held the attention of that varied throng than with the chanting over and over of the refrain, " For three transgressions, yea, for four, will I not turn away the punishment "? How could he more readily have en-

gaged their sympathetic attention at the very outset than by appealing to their patriotism and nationalistic feeling, by pointing out the sins of their neighbours? We can almost hear the fierce yells of approval, as he castigates Damascus, and Philistia, and Phenicia, and Edom, and Ammon. There were men there old enough to remember how the fierce, brutal soldiers from Damascus, aided by the Ammonites, had visited Gilead, the country lying east of the Jordan and so most exposed to sudden incursions, with fire and sword, showing fiendish cruelty that did not spare women and children. Fiery denunciation of such wickedness would be hailed with the same sort of frenzied approval as greeted some orator in pioneer days of our own country when he denounced the redskins for their horrible outrages. We see the crowd surging back and forth in growing excitement, shouting their approval as the penetrating voice declares that Jehovah will cut off Damascus and its country, visiting it with fire and sword.

Another section of the crowd would shout itself hoarse with approval as the speaker next launched a fierce attack on the Philistines, and

Phenicians, and Edomites, who, on the north and west and south, made slave raids into the territory of Israel, carrying off the people "wholesale" (1:6) to sell them as slaves. Worst of all were the Edomites, who made a business of this slave-trade, incited the other nations to pursue it, and made it lucrative for them. We can see the throng wrought to a high pitch of frenzied approval as the speaker thus attacks their traditional enemies, and declares that God will judge them for their wickedness.

Doubtless it sobered and shocked some for the moment, as suddenly the speaker turned the stream of his denunciation against Judah. Jealous as the two countries were toward each other, they could never quite forget that they were of common stock and common faith. Their feuds were family affairs, bitter, but forgotten often in the face of common enemies. Very likely some shook their heads, and whispered to themselves, "He is going too far," when Amos declared that for three transgressions of Judah, yea, for four, Jehovah would not turn away the punishment thereof. Yet the charge is vague, and familiar. Judah had

not kept the law, had walked after lies. Little more in that than a general accusation of sinfulness, which need not stir one's complacency too deeply.

Then, having thus drawn them on to register violent and unqualified assent to his denunciation of these surrounding nations for their sins, the prophet suddenly flings his real message full in the face of the startled crowd. They had been shouting, urging him on, yelling whatever in those days took the place of such expressions as "Go to it! Attaboy!" Suddenly, the speaker paused. There was a tightening of suspense, a heightening of dramatic quality. The speaker's hand shot out, and his voice cried, "For three transgressions of *Israel,* yea for four, will I not turn away the punishment thereof." Turn back from your neighbours, and look at yourselves, in the sight of God. What have you been? What have you done? Incisively, in few words, he sets out those social wrongs that "sin against the strength of youth," shameless debauchery, hard-hearted injustice, oppression of the poor and helpless. How stinging and vivid is the language: "Ye that pant after the dust of the

earth on the head of the poor." He sets forth all their petty cruelties and irreverences. They make their sleep comfortable on clothing taken as security from the poor, knowing that the law of God commands the return of such garments before nightfall. They use the wine paid in as an offering at the shrines to help on their shameless revellings. Yet God has tenderly cared for them, displaced other races to give them their favoured home, sent messengers to tell them of His truth and His law. But they have rejected the messengers, silenced them, debauched them.

So, for all these sins, swift and terrible punishment will come. The threat is all the more sinister and terrifying for being left vague. Something will come upon them that will press them down, as the sheaves are pressed tight in a cart. No one can escape. No strength, or swiftness, or audacity, or adroitness, can deliver in that day. God has judged. God has spoken. Let them heed the word!

So, we infer, ended the first speech of Amos in Bethel. We see him closing with that vague threat,—perhaps because he saw that they would stand no more at that time,—disappear-

ing as suddenly and dramatically as he had appeared. The crowd surges, talks, wonders, melts away. Many forget. Some remember. All are eager to hear him again.

The remainder of the book is less clear and connected. Some of it reads as if it were made up of portions of speeches, some as if it were written comment and reflection.

Yet, if we give a little freer rein to the imagination, we can construct with some plausibility, out of material in the third, fourth, and fifth chapters, the address given by Amos on a later day of the festival.

Again we find that it takes little fancy to picture the scene with some vividness. Once more the crowd is surging about in the public square. Once more the gaunt, uncouth figure appears, the set face arrests attention, the vibrant voice is heard appealing to the conscience. We can see with some clearness the various parties and groups, that one after another come under the lash of his moral judgments. Evidently they are aroused. He turns upon one group and another, as if they were questioning him, provoking him.

The opening words of the third chapter

strongly suggest that some in the crowd, resenting his severe strictures upon their national life, were asking who this self-appointed judge is, and by what authority he speaks. Does he not know that we are the people of God, the chosen race? How dare he declare that God will punish us?

So he answers with the direct statement: "Yes, you are God's special people, His chosen nation. But just for that reason you are to be judged the more severely" (3:1, 2). Here is set forth clearly the very principle of Jesus: "To whom much is given, of them shall much be required." It was a new note in that day. It is new even now to many. Have we yet learned that to be the chosen of God means, not special privilege, special exemption, so much as heavier responsibility? For the first time in religious history, a man has insight enough to declare to men that, instead of thinking that they are safe, whatever they do, because they are God's favourites, they should think rather that they must be doubly careful what they do, because they belong to God. The religion of the spirit is beginning to dawn.

Then, incisively and strongly, he takes up

the question of his right or authority to speak in the name of God. Always that has been the question put to true prophets: "Where are your credentials?" He shows no certificate of ordination, no license from any church body; no miracles to authenticate his message. This is his answer: "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed? Will a lion roar, a trap be sprung, a trumpet be blown, unless there is reason for it?" This is his answer: Use your common sense; study the relation of cause and effect. Watch and see if what I say corresponds to the facts. It is the same answer as that which Christ gave when He told His critics to read "the signs of the times."

You are in a lonely spot, Amos says, and you see a man walk up and wait. After awhile another man appears, and they walk off together. Is it not evident that they have agreed to meet and to do something in common? How can you know that I am from God? Look and see if my message fits the facts, touches the conscience. Does it *find* you? That is the best evidence.

Here emerges, dimly but really, the noble principle of true Protestantism that authority

resides ultimately in the *truth itself,* and in the spirit of man as instinctively capable of reacting to that truth, rather than in any authenticating men or institutions.

It is the daring but satisfying position taken in that majestic section of the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which recounts the many excellencies of the word of God, and then goes on to state that our one conclusive reason for assurance is the testimony of the Spirit as we read. It is a fundamental position of the religion of the spirit which meets us in germ here in the defense Amos offers for his claim to speak with the authority of God.

He then launches an indictment, general but definite, fierce, and biting, against the wrong conditions in the land, the injustice, the luxury, the debauchery, the godlessness; and he prophesies ruin for church and state, a ruin in which palaces and temples shall be alike involved (3:9-15).

Suddenly (4:1 *ff.*) he turns upon the women. It is as if he had been interrupted in the midst of his storm of denunciation, by the shrill, mocking laughter of the idle, fashionable

women. Roughly he calls them "cattle," "cows of Bashan." He strongly hints, or more than hints, that the injustices, the social inequalities and oppressions, the shameful indulgence and luxury, that disfigure the life of Israel, are traceable to their greed and idleness. It is they who urge their husbands on to unprincipled money-making, through their extravagance, their incessant demands for greater luxury. He solemnly predicts that a day of woe and destruction will come upon them, when, like the senseless cattle they are, they will be driven out through the breaches in the defenses of their cities, and hurried into cruel captivity.

If they plead their religiousness, their pious practices, he scornfully tells them that though these religious performances may please them, they do not, and cannot, please God (4:4, 5). Such meaningless, perfunctory worship in reality only adds to their transgression.

He shows how God has tried to awaken them to a true sense of their sin and of His demands, by judgments, scarcity of food, drought, mildew, plagues of insects, pestilence, earthquakes. Yet all this has not made them

stop and think, and return to God. Therefore heavier judgment is coming upon them. Let them prepare to meet God, as He comes in vengeance to punish their light and cruel wrongdoing. Not yet does he make clear what this imminent peril is. The threat is still vague in outline. But there is nothing vague in the solemn and majestic picture he draws of the God they must prepare to meet, God, the maker of heaven and earth (4:6-13).

Amos comes now to the very height of his prophecy (chapter 5). Here shines clear the dawn of the spirit. Opening with a further prediction of impending ruin, "The virgin of Israel is fallen: there is none to raise her up," he proceeds to a noble setting forth of the contrast between real and false religion.

"Seek me, and ye shall live." Here, in the simplest of phrases, is revealed the very heart, the life-principle, of the religion of the spirit. Life, salvation, comes only through personal knowledge of God, trust in Him, seeking and finding Him.

But do not think, the prophet goes on in solemn warning, do not think that to seek *me* is synonymous with seeking holy places, or

offering proper sacrifices, or engaging in formal worship. Where shall one best find God? In two places. In nature and in the moral law. The keen mind of Kant could give no better answer. Where is God? Seek Him in the stars, in the wonders of the world He has made (5:8). "Seek Him that maketh Pleiades and Orion." Here we may well remind ourselves that true spiritual religion has always kept close company with natural religion. The men who have watched the skies, and learned the secrets of the earth, and come to understand the ways of nature and of God in nature, have ever been friends and companions of free, real spiritual religion. Alfred Noyes' *Watchers of the Skies* is a splendid expression of the debt which modern religion owes to the pioneers of science. The best religion of our time finds itself coming into ever closer and warmer relations with the best science of our time. We may well distrust a religion which turns away in distrust from full knowledge of nature, its facts and laws.

But God is to be truly found also in the conscience of the race, and in high ethical ideals and conduct. The passage in which Amos

expresses this great truth is one of the noblest in all literature (5:14, 15).

" Seek good and not evil " if you would find God. Hate what is evil, establish justice in the courts, all through the life of the community and nation; then God will truly be with you, as you *say* that He is. Here shines forth a clear recognition of the necessity of right moral conduct and social justice as a condition of true religious experience.

Here he suddenly turns aside to speak of the " Day of the Lord," giving voice to truths which many in our day may well heed, who turn all their religious life and interest into expectancy of the coming of the Lord.

It is not unlikely that just at this point some of the people in the crowd began calling out that " The Day of the Lord " was coming, and would make all things right. Exactly as certain extremists grow restive today when one preaches a social gospel, and cry out that we must wait for the coming of the Lord to set things right; so in that early time there were men, some of the sons of the prophets, who looked eagerly for a " Day of the Lord," when God would come in person to avenge His own,

to smite their enemies, and raise His people high above all others. They talked of that "Day," as groups of foolish Pan-Germans toasted "Der Tag," in the days just before the war.

Keenly, strongly, almost bitterly, he tells them how different the day of the Lord will be from that which they expect. No day of exultation, but one of terror, for them, and for all the thoughtless. That day will be "darkness, and not light." Its terrors none can escape. One will flee from it as from a wild beast, running into the house for protection, only to be bitten by a deadly snake.

No! It is useless to dream of a good day coming, if we are not right with God now, individually and collectively.

Then comes a magnificent expression of the real nature of spiritual religion (5:21-25). What does God want of us? Offerings, music, prayers? Yes, if these come as expressions of honest and true devotion in heart and conduct. But, lacking that, all the outward forms and ceremonies are hateful and detestable to God. Here all the true prophets seem to unite in one great message. It is the very essence of true

Protestantism, of real spiritual religion, that finds expression in this notable passage. God must have first of all, and all through, righteousness. "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Nothing else is of value if that be missing. Nothing in heaven or earth can be a substitute for righteousness. In that simple, rugged statement we get to the rock bottom of true, spiritual religion.

He raises an exceedingly interesting question about the character of their primitive religion, under Moses. "Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" The obvious answer is that they did not. That which distinguished their religion at the outset was *the moral law,* not the sacrifices and ceremonies. We get back to the true first principles when we get back to a religion of conscience and communion with God in the heart.

It may be that in the seventh chapter we have the outline of still a third address given by Amos at a gathering of the people. Here he tells of certain visions of judgment. First come locusts, devastating the country. He

cries to God for mercy, and the plague ceases. Then comes fire, devouring the land. Again the intercession of the seer avails. At last comes a vision of Jehovah standing with a plumbline, testing the integrity of the national character. And here the voice of the lover of his people falters; he cannot, dare not, pray for mercy. He knows that any life, any community, any social order, that is out of plumb with the righteousness of God, must come down. Again the lesson is forcibly and clearly impressed, that there is no substitute for being right, no hope for wilful continuance in wrongdoing. Judgment is sure, where evil ways continue. Not even prayer can avail there.

Now Amos becomes very definite and outspoken. Heretofore the hints of imminent peril and judgment, though powerful and terrifying, have been shadowy. Now he speaks out, in definite prediction that palaces and temples shall be laid low; and that the royal house shall come under the sword. He dares mention the king by name (7:9).

Be sure the priests and politicians had been watching for some definite word, some specific threat, on which they could lay hold, even as

the Pharisees lay in wait for Jesus, "to catch something out of his mouth." No sooner has he mentioned the king's name than the leading priest, Amaziah, evidently sure of royal backing, springs up, accuses Amos of being an upstart, a disturber, a blasphemer (how familiar it all sounds and seems!), and contemptuously tells him to get back to his own country and talk there, if they will let him. Plainly they will deport him as an undesirable alien! Amos replies somewhat uncertainly, as if he hardly knew what to do. He disclaims any official standing as a prophet. He declares that he "cannot but speak the things that he has seen and heard." He warns the priest that he and his family will be among the first to suffer in the coming judgment.

Evidently he has to go. There is no more opportunity to voice the message of the God of justice in public. Back to the little village of Tekoa he walks, perhaps heavy at heart at the blocking of his way, the thwarting of his work. But then he makes a momentous decision. He will write, if they will not let him speak. So begins written prophecy, that sacred treasure of the soul of man. Here also

Amos is the pioneer. And here he is a true forerunner of the true religion of the spirit, which has ever held high in reverence the written word of God.

Out of the remaining part of his brief book stands one magnificent, far-seeing passage, in which he makes the clear statement that God is the God of all nations, not merely of Israel. The same God who brought up Israel from Egypt, brought the Philistines from Cyprus, and the Aramæans from Kir (9:7). For this, and only this, is the decisive mark of the chosen of God, *righteousness*. The nation that sins is not God's nation; the nation that lives by His righteous law is His chosen. It is an amazing declaration for that early time. Whence could it have come to this untutored herdsman, save from the inspiration of God?

We have no record of the further life and service of this man of God, nor do we know what impression his words and spirit made upon the men of his own day. His warnings found terrible verification within a few years, when the Assyrian storm swept over Israel, and left it a desert. His warnings came too late, for the people would not heed. Israel was

indeed, as he said, like "a basket of summer fruit," outwardly fair, but with the germs of swift decay already at work within (8:1-3).

But the glorious fact is this: heeded or not in that day, a note of pure spiritual religion had been struck, and its vibrations still are sounding in the ears of all who will hear the word of the Lord. Great, enduring principles and ideals, that underlie and condition all true and worthy religion, found their first clear, sure expression through this servant of God. What are they?

1. That God is the God of all men, and all nations, not of certain favoured races and groups.
2. That sin and punishment are cause and effect, and cannot be severed the one from the other. It is useless, stupid, to trifle with that law. There is no substitute for righteousness. No sacrifice, no form, no ceremony, can take its place in the least degree.
3. God demands and desires, first of all, not worship, but character, personal righteousness, social justice, cleanness of heart and life. The man or the group or the nation that cannot stand before God to be judged is doomed.

We can sum up his message in the simple but majestic word that religion and righteousness are one and inseparable, now and forever.

What a message it was, and is! How we need it today! They will need it down to the last day the last man spends on earth. Still do men seek substitutes, something else that will do as well as righteousness, take the place of righteousness. And still stands the granite message of the herdsman Amos, that there is nothing else that will serve. Righteousness of heart and life is, and must ever be, the ultimate test and ground of religion.

There is more to religion, as there is more to a house than the foundation. But to have laid such a foundation is glory enough for one man. Down through the ages true souls have reverenced, and will reverence, the man who first set in clear, simple, noble words the great truth on which all spiritual religion rests, that God wants righteousness, all through personal and common life, and will be satisfied with nothing else.

III

THE POET: HOSEA

III

THE POET: HOSEA

WHEN Amos uttered his solemn and terrifying warnings, doubtless many of the hearers scoffed, lifting their eyebrows in incredulous, supercilious surprise. The words spoken to the daring prophet by the priest Amaziah suggest such contempt, as for an ignorant fanatic. His words were very clear and unmistakable in their prediction of utter wreck and ruin, to come in the lifetime of those who heard him speak.

We can easily imagine how some of them cried, "Look about you and see! Does this look like a country on the edge of doom? Why, we are in the midst of the greatest national expansion and prosperity our country has ever known. We have a strong, wise king on the throne. Internally there is order and wealth, externally we are at peace and amply able to keep the peace by our armed strength. Who but a fanatical dreamer, a foolish prophet,

could think that danger and destruction are imminent? "

Yet it all came true within a few years, with startling swiftness. Men and women who had mocked at Amos, and gone their ways unmoved by his stern warnings, lived to reap the bitter harvest of their careless and godless living. It was true, that vision of Israel as a basket of overripe fruit, fair to the eye, but rotten at the heart. He saw, as others did not, the forces gathering for the attack from without, the corruption weakening the defenses within.

Just how long the apparent prosperity of Israel lasted, after Amos had voiced his threatening prophecies, we do not know. It may have been twenty years. Probably it was nearer ten years. Then Jeroboam II., the strong monarch, died. His son succeeded as a matter of course. But he was on the throne for but a half a year. A man named Shallum headed a rebellion, put the son of Jeroboam to death, and made himself king. So began what quickly became a riot of bloodshed and anarchy. For Shallum held the throne only for a month. Then, as so often happens in times

of disorder, the military took control. Menahem, leader of the army, marched to the capital, slew the man who had been king for a month, and made himself ruler of the land. He seems to have been a coarse military ruler, who maintained a kind of order by superimposed terror. He collected taxes, took what he wanted, and let other functions of government lapse. Roads and towns were neglected during the ten years of his misrule. Thieves and bandits made all the countryside unsafe. Adroit selfseekers flattered the king, and used his power to their own advantage. During this period came the armies of Assyria demanding tribute. Menahem bought immunity by the payment of a huge bribe, the collection of which left the whole land impoverished. He managed to retain his throne through ruthlessness.

After his death, his son succeeded to the throne, but he reigned only two years. Then came another revolt, led by another chief of the army, Pekah, who took the throne and reigned twenty years, we are told in the Second Book of Kings. There is some confusion and doubt as to the exact time. We know lit-

tle or nothing as to the events of his reign, save that toward the end of it, the armies of Assyria again invaded the land, this time devastating a large section of the upper part of the country, later known as Galilee, carrying off great numbers of the people into captivity, in accordance with the cruel policy of Assyria, to rule the world by displacing people, breaking their spirit by tearing them up from the roots. The terror and grief that spread all through Israel and Judah when this deportation took place finds a reflection in the writings of Isaiah, who from Jerusalem watched the sad events and wrote of the "dimness and darkness that grievously afflicted the land of Zebulun and Naphtali" (Isaiah 9:1).

It may have been on the tide of popular resentment against a ruler under whom such misfortunes occurred that the last adventurer mounted the throne of Israel. His name was Hoshea, and he held his position for nine years, a time of increasing distress and anarchy. Then he took part in an insane plot to throw off the yoke of Assyria. Quickly came the crushing response of the great world-empire.

Samaria, the capital, was captured, after a siege characterized by fearful suffering; a great mass of the people was led into captivity; and Israel, the Northern Kingdom, ceased to exist as a nation. It is likely that a considerable number of the original inhabitants remained in the land, forming the major part of the stock from which later came the Galilean population of Palestine. But Ephraim had come to an end. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, maintained itself for some one hundred and twenty-five years longer. (Read II Kings 15:8-30; 17:1-6.)

So came the judgment foreseen by Amos. The storm broke within a few years after his fiery words had startled the people, and all was over within thirty or forty years.

At some point in this stormy period, we do not know exactly when, another prophetic voice made itself heard. This was the voice of Hosea, the son of Beeri. We know nothing of him save what we gather from the book that bears his name. It is not easy to be sure as to the facts underlying that book. We have called him a poet. We are sure that word describes him. We picture him as Sargent has

shown him in his frieze of the prophets, with a sensitive, winsome face, deep-set eyes, clear-cut features, a slight figure, a soul at once indomitable and gentle, firm and exquisitely tender, glowing through a slight but beautiful and attractive body.

The book of Hosea is one of the most turgid, confused, difficult parts of the Bible. The text has not been well preserved. And even when we are most sure of the words used, the meaning is obscure through the presence of "local colour," allusions that meant much then and mean nothing now. Few can pick up the book and read it with much intelligent understanding, unless they have a background of knowledge of the man and his times, against which to set the strangely confused sentences.

Some one said of Browning's *Sordello* that only two lines in it are wholly intelligible, and that they are untrue. One of them is the opening word, "Who will may hear Sordello's story told;" the other is the closing word, "Who would has heard Sordello's story told." One feels in that way about this book of Hosea. It is hard to find in it anything very clear and connected.

Yet certain statements can be made with confidence.

We find in the book wonderful pen pictures of actual conditions. These are caustic criticisms of how kings were made and pulled down, feared yet despised; of priests deceiving the people, scheming for their selfish advantage, not stopping short of murder itself when it served their ends (6:9). We see roads neglected, people afraid, poverty and terror everywhere; and over it all tyranny and misrule, injustice and irreligion. Scattered through the book is a series of flashlight pictures which illustrate and confirm the brief account of the times given in the Second Book of the Kings.

We come upon incisive and concise comments which reveal the keen observer with an epigrammatic style. "There is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood" (4:1, 2).

He traces back the evil conditions to the lack of real religion. The priesthood is cor-

rupt. Perhaps he is the first to protest against the danger of an ignorant priesthood. "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me" (4:6-13). Under the lead of such priests, the people have become ignorant, fickle, superstitious in their religion. They will pray to Jehovah when they are in a tight place, and forget Him so soon as the pressure is relaxed. There is a beautiful prayer recorded in the opening verses of the sixth chapter. But readers sometimes miss the very point of that prayer, the shallow assumption on the part of the worshippers that God will easily heed and answer them, in a day or two. No wonder that the prophet hears the Lord crying out in despair, "O Ephraim, what shall I do? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

How clearly, in a few scornful words, he shows the folly of their shifting, uncertain foreign policy. "Ephraim is like a silly dove. They call unto Egypt, they go to Assyria,"—fluttering from one to the other of the great powers, never committed to a steady course (7:11).

Equally keen is his insight into conditions within the kingdom. "They set up kings, but not by me." "Surely they say, we have no king; for we fear not Jehovah: and the king, what can he do for us?" What a picture, in a dozen words, of a dozen years of religious and political anarchy!

Yet here and there amid this confusion and riot of scenes, reflecting faithfully the welter of the times, we come upon beautiful bits of wisdom and expressions of religious feeling. Hosea's little book is full of "familiar quotations," and sayings that might well be so used. A vivid, inspired mind and imagination speak here. Some of these epigrams have passed into common use: "Like people, like priest." "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." "I desire goodness, and not sacrifice" (a favourite quotation of Jesus). "Ephraim is a cake not turned." "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind." "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us." "I drew them with the cords of love." Here we see the poet, who can set common experience in unforgettable words.

It would be hard to find in all literature a

better summing up of personal, national, or racial characteristics in a brief phrase than in his description of Jacob, the man and the nation: "In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he had power with God." How could one better express that strange combination of keen business capacity and spiritual insight which has always distinguished the sons of Jacob? And how acutely he goes on to analyze the way in which the sharper has for the time got the better of the saint, in the character of the Jacob of that day (12:7 *ff.*). It was in the writings of Hosea that Paul found that dramatic, poetic cry, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy destruction?" though he gave it a Christian meaning, which the original lacked, turning a call for vengeance into a shout of victory.

These are outstanding examples of the style of a great poet, who saw things vividly, and could set what he saw in words of precision and power.

But there is something far greater and deeper in this man and his book. He was more than a realist with a captivating style.

He saw clear through facts to the mighty truths of religion and of life, to the true relation between God and man.

He saw certain truths and principles which no one else had seen up to that time, not even Elijah or Amos. Some of these truths which he saw clearly we are still in process of learning.

He saw the danger of using images in worship. In Bethel and Dan and Samaria had stood, all through the life of the Northern Kingdom, "the calves," images representing God, probably like the Cherubim that guarded the ark, and not unlike those winged bulls with human faces, made familiar to us in Assyrian sculpture. No one, not even the great spiritual leaders Elijah and Amos, had said a word against the use of such images in the worship of Jehovah, or dropped a hint that such a practice was unwise or harmful. If the Second Commandment was in existence, it had been long forgotten. But this clear-visioned man of God sees the superstition and degradation that inevitably accompanies the use of images in worship. He pours out scorn and anger against the "calves," declares that Je-

hovah has cast them off, will have nothing to do with them. "The workman made it, and it is no god." These golden images are mere curios, to be carried off as presents to the King of Assyria (8:5, 6; 10:5, 6).

Other messengers of God had seen the iniquity of worshipping Baal, or bowing down to images of other gods. This man saw the danger associated with the use of any image in connection with the worship of God. He was, in his day, a true Protestant, with as strong a zeal for pure worship, unadulterated with the leaven of idolatry, as that which characterized the most iconoclastic of the Reformers in the sixteenth century.

He saw high moral ideals with equal clearness. Here was a man whose position with regard to sex morality was higher than that attained by any other leader of ancient times. Indeed, he took a position beyond the average moral standards of a large part of present society. Sexual immorality was prevalent in that day. Customary restraints were broken down. Men of intelligence and integrity were uneasy over the careless behaviour of the women. The common worship of the time en-

couraged the indulgence of the sexual instinct as part of religion, and the effects were plain. There was much concern over the careless conduct of wives and daughters. But this man turned to the men and said: "What about yourselves?" Hear him set forth that single standard of chastity which even yet is not fully accepted: "I will not blame your brides and your daughters when they go astray. For the men themselves go with the prostitutes" (4:14). He sweeps away all subterfuges and excuses, and calls the men to live in the same purity as that which they demand on the part of the women. There is something here unmatched in the history of ethics until we see the Son of Man lifting His head and saying: "Let him that is without sin among you first cast a stone at her."

Some of these instances of clear moral insight running far ahead of his time are traceable to the man's own personal and domestic experiences, as we shall see. But before we take up his strange story, we would note one more great contribution he made to the religion of the spirit.

For Hosea is memorable and ever to be

honoured for more than all that we have mentioned. To him belongs the honour of being the first man to see with clearness the fundamental place of love in religion, as the chief element in the character of God, and in the conduct of man. What honour can be too great for the man who brought to light that supreme truth? Think how basic love is in all true religion! How it shines all through the fabric of Christianity! "God is love." Christ made love the very sum and heart of true religion. And here is the man who first gave clear expression to that great truth.

The Fatherhood of God is more definitely expressed by Hosea than by any other writer in the Old Testament, unless by the author of the One Hundred and Third Psalm. It is to him the deep, determining fact in religion and theology.

In the eleventh chapter he gives a beautiful picture of Israel as a little child. God tenderly cares for him, teaches him to walk, trains him lovingly, drawing him with human ties, with cords of love. This passage only brings to vivid and concrete expression what is found again and again through the book. "How can

I give thee up?" "I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely." And God, who is loving and tender toward men, calls for the same spirit in them. "I desire love, and not sacrifice." "Turn unto God; keep kindness and justice."

To Amos' noble watchword, "Justice," this man adds the other keynote of spiritual religion, "love." Each is incomplete without the other. No one can say which has wrought the more havoc in the world, unjust love, or unloving justice. God comes truly into control only where justice and love blend in perfect union. It is a great message which Amos brings: "God is just and demands righteousness." It is a deeper and richer message that comes from Hosea! "God is loving, and requires lovingkindness."

How did this man come upon this deep, rich truth, which others had not seen? We are justified in saying that he learned it out of personal experience. The book opens with a strange tale, or set of incidents. On the surface it is repulsive to our better instincts. God tells the man to go and marry an impure woman, and to call the children of the marriage

by names that suggest severe judgment. Later he tells him again to go and buy an abandoned woman, and have her as his wife.

This is an involved and revolting story, on the face of it. But we are justified in letting the imagination play about the scant, bare facts that are disclosed, until it reconstructs a beautiful idyl of faithful love which lies concealed beneath the surface. We cannot say with assurance that this is the true account of what happened to the man. But we can say that, better than any other theory, it fits what we know of the man, the scattered allusions to his domestic affairs, and the religious truth he learned from his sad experiences. Frankly acknowledging that exact knowledge is impossible, let us set the imagination free among the facts we know.

It reveals to us a scene of human love and happiness, swiftly changed to bitter tragedy, and then redeemed by wonderful, far-going love.

This is the story as I see it:

Hosea, young, ardent, idealistic, fell in love with a beautiful girl named Gomer (1:3). They were very happy. Their first child, a

boy, was named by them Jezreel (1:4), perhaps because of some tender association with that place; or, more likely, because they thought of him as "God's harvest," Jezreel meaning "that which God has sown." They felt that their child was a gift from God. Later came a daughter, to whom they gave the name Ruhamah (1:6), mercy, or lovingkindness,—as in former days good people loved to name a girl "Charity" or "Mercy."

But as time went on, a cloud appeared in their sky. Gomer, the wife of Hosea, was "very religious." She was passionate, capricious, headstrong. How often have poets loved such women! There was colour, ardour, passion in her. Perhaps she grew weary of the pure idealism of her husband, as one tires of rich food. Certainly she was caught and enticed by the Baal-worship of the time (4:12, 13). It seems incredible to us that religion was ever intimately associated with sexual indulgence; but so it was in that time and place. Priests there were who taught women that it might be, in some strange way, a holy thing to give their bodies to the use of the worshippers of the god. This woman was led on thus

under the guise of worship toward the depths of unchaste indulgence. Hosea watched her course with bitterness of anguish, powerless to arrest it. Doubtless she yielded at first, as do the followers of any evil habit, only infrequently, coming back to her home again so that her lover and husband hoped that all would be well. But, as so often happens, the yieldings became more frequent, the outbreaks more violent, until she broke with him and with her home, and flung away to live her shameless, unrestrained life of license (2:5).

The man sat amid the ruins of his shattered home. All was changed; even the names of his children took on a sinister meaning. "Jezreel" now stood for all the iniquity, the bloodshed and lust of the ruling dynasty, which called for vengeance. Ruhamah became "Lo-Ruhamah," "no-mercy," "no-charity." The third child, born when suspicion was changing into bitter certainty, he called "Lo-Ammi," "no kin of mine" (1:6 and 9).

His life was ruined. Most men even now, and all men then, would have cast off the unfaithful wife like a filthy rag, divorced her, as men might do then, with a word, and let her

go. Most men would have gone broken through life, nursing their self-pity, or have hardened into bitter cynicism.

But this man was not like most men. In his heart he still loved the woman who had played him false. He could not wholly forget her. And he saw and felt that that love still bore its obligations.

Moreover, he saw, for he was a man of God, how close was the analogy with God and His people. It took a very great soul, thus to look at his own private griefs "*sub specie eternitatis*," to forget somewhat his own sorrows in thinking of the great, suffering heart of God. But, out of the shock of his wife's inexcusable treatment of him and of his love, out of the realization that he still loved her, that such love could not wholly die, came the luminous conviction, that God so loved the men who so dealt with Him. "Is she not like the rest of us?" he asked. "Are not we treating God just so?"

There came the accompanying thought: "How does God deal with us?" He began to see the infinite patience, the readiness to bear and endure, of that "love that will not

let us go." Back over the history of the people of God his mind roamed, recalling their many infidelities, their callous disregard of His lovingkindness, and seeing, as never before, the wonder of the patience, the enduring love, of the God who would not forsake those whom He had loved (9:10, 11; 14:1-4).

Out of such thoughts came a painfully practical question: Should not I be like God? Should not I bear all, and still seek the one who has wounded and rejected me? So he went in search of the wife who had flouted his love, and left his home. He found her (3:1 and 2). She had sunk very low, had become a slave; perhaps one of those temple slaves whose dreadful calling was hidden under the conventional name of "holy women;" perhaps the chattel of some private owner. In any event, he paid the miserable price of her redemption, and bought her back. She came with him away from the house of bondage, with scarcely more of feeling in her heart, it may be, than a dull relief at being released, and a vague wonder why he had done it. He could not at once resume with her the tender relations of husband and wife (3:3). Some

time must pass. Yet he set himself to win her soul, as he had bought back her outward freedom. He said to himself, as we clearly read in the story, that two things would most powerfully work for the end he sought. First, there were the children (2:1, 2). They would plead with her, their very presence would work powerfully on her soul. And then there were the old familiar places. He would, after awhile, take her back to where she had first seen him and loved him; and there he would "speak to her heart," and call her back to the old ways (2:14-16). So she would once more live with him in true love; and the children would be no longer "Lo-Ruhamah" and "Lo-Ammi," but "Ruhamah," Mercy, and "Ammi," My-own (2:22, 23).

Did his incredibly patient and loving effort succeed? We do not know. We can only say, it must have. Who could withstand such tender love, such unwavering faithfulness?

If we have read aright the love story of this man, where else in all human history is there a lover fit to stand beside him?

But the most sublimely beautiful fact is that the man won, out of this painful but victorious

experience of what love can do, and how far it can go, his clear vision of the loving-kindness of God, the eternal beauty of the divine love. Eight centuries before Jesus taught the parable of the Prodigal Son, this man outlined a parable of the Prodigal Wife. He tells us how she went away, lured by the desire for pleasure and riches; and how, when these failed, and, like the Prodigal, she "came to herself," she said, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now" (2:7). And in this story of one tired of the husks, and turning in shame and longing to the old home, he found the picture of the soul of man, turning from sin back to the love of the Father, God (2:19, 20).

Out of his "stony griefs" this man raised a Bethel, a sanctuary, that has sheltered and blessed multitudes of men and women. Thousands who have never read his book, or have read it only to be confused and to find no clear message in it, have found their hope and joy and salvation in that love of God which he first discovered through faithfully dealing with his own hard fate.

Out of this fact shines forth, bright and

clear, one of the vital principles of the true religion of the spirit, that personal experience is the best source of religious knowledge and progress. This man was so sure that God is love because he had proved the beauty and glory and power of love. He found God in his own life-process. He understood God by faithfulness to the life God gave him to live. Treading with unswerving fidelity the hard path marked out for him, he made it a highway for the soul of humanity. In lesser measure he did what the Lord Jesus did for all men perfectly, made his personal sorrows and agonies a redeeming power for human life.

It is not an easy book to read and study, this book of Hosea. It is blotted with tears, torn with heart-struggles, distracted with the confusion of the times and of his broken home and heart. But through it shines a great soul, one of God's own, who added to the strong word "Righteousness," so sternly and nobly proclaimed by the earlier prophet, the tender and winsome word, "Love," which has become the very heart of true religion. We bless the God of the prophets for this true, and beautiful spirit that, out of an experience that

would have left most of us crushed and embittered and hopeless, won his way to light and truth, and left for us men and for our salvation the clear, undying truth that God is love, and wants from us, above all, love like His own. In coming near to Hosea, we come very near to Christ.

IV

THE STATESMAN: THE LIFE, WORDS, AND WORKS OF ISAIAH

IV

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TO turn from such a book as that of Hosea to such a book as that of Isaiah is like coming out from a trackless jungle, where one is overcome with the beauty of the tangled foliage but can scarce make his way, into clear, open country, where there are good roads, or at least clearly-defined trails. In all the prophetic writings of the Old Testament there is nothing clearer than the writings of Isaiah. And through them the personality and character of this man of God shine out with glorious distinctness.

This man was the greatest of the four who appeared so close together in the eighth century B. C. Perhaps it is not too strong a claim to assert that he is the greatest of all the prophets in the Old Testament. Amos had, and ever will retain, the glory of being the

pioneer. But this man Isaiah had a soul and a message incomparably bigger, richer, more brilliant, versatile and many sided, than those of the Tekoan herdsman.

It may be well to say a word about the material in the book. Not all of it comes from Isaiah himself. Four chapters in the centre (36 to 39, inclusive) are practically identical with a part of the history in the Book of Kings. Why they are included here no one knows. The latter part of the book (chapters 40-66) comes from a later period, or later periods.

The reasons for this judgment are conclusive. Indeed, there is no reason to be urged for counting this section the product of Isaiah's mind and soul except that it has always been found bound in with the rest in a single book. Allusions to later times and characters are distinct, the style is different from that of Isaiah, the religious ideas are very different; and, when we remember how readily in ancient times bits of prophecy from different sources were joined together, we see that there is no valid reason for holding that this later part of the book comes from Isaiah.

It is a question of unimportance. No one can question that the second half of the book comes from God. It authenticates itself as one reads, and that is the ultimate test, as the Westminster Confession of Faith so nobly says. The question of authorship is interesting, but unimportant.

A delightful story is told, which illustrates the fine sanity of Dwight L. Moody. Early in the days of Northfield Conferences, George Adam Smith was invited to give a series of studies of Isaiah at one of them. He demurred, saying to Mr. Moody, "You know, I believe that there were two Isaiahs, perhaps more." Mr. Moody replied, "Most people don't even know there was one!"

Even in the first thirty-five chapters, questions are raised by scholars as to the amount that comes surely from Isaiah himself. But it is safe to assume that the bulk of this material is from him. We are reasonably sure of most of the great passages.

This man of God lived a long, busy, and useful life. He tells us that he began his work "in the year that King Uzziah died." That was somewhere between 740 and 738 B. C. He

was in the full tide of power and influence when Sennacherib invaded Judea in 701 B. C. To the best of our knowledge, his work as a prophet and political leader continued for at least fifteen years more. He must therefore have been actively at work as a prophetic leader of his nation for about fifty-five years. It is clear that he must have begun his work at an early age. In all probability he was not over twenty years of age when the call came to him through his original vision.

The contrast between Amos and Isaiah is striking and obvious. Amos was from the country, Isaiah from the city. Amos was probably uncultured, Isaiah seems to have had the best intellectual training obtainable in his time and place. Amos was a peasant; Isaiah was almost certainly a noble, perhaps connected with the royal family. Amos was a radical reformer, Isaiah was a statesman, dealing with political and social conditions on a basis of high ideals and convictions. Yet at heart, in aim and spirit, they were one. We wish we knew whether they came into touch with each other. Certainly such personal contact would have been easy and natural. Giving rein to

the imagination, we can picture the young noble striding down the road, quickly covering the dozen miles that lay between Jerusalem and Tekoa, that he might listen to the gaunt herdsman's impassioned talk, or going to Bethel that he might hear the startling addresses of the older prophet.

This at least is certain,—he caught the fire from the torch held up by the pioneer: and he made it burn more brightly.

As we have said, he was a noble, his home in the city. We may say of him that he was the first city preacher, in that noble line that takes in Jeremiah, Paul, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Savonarola, and many another, down through Beecher and Brooks. Moses, Elijah, these were men of the desert, of the open spaces. Amos came from a village. Micah, as we shall see, disliked the city and its life. Isaiah lived in the city, loved it, believed in it, found his life in it. He identified the nation with the city. To him Jerusalem was Judea as truly as, to Victor Hugo, Paris was France. It is in the visions and writings of Isaiah that we first come upon that splendid conception of a "City of God," which grew to

grandeur in the Apocalypse and in Augustine's *Civitas Dei.*

If we are to get a true and coherent idea of his career we must transpose the material of his book somewhat. The first chapter clearly reflects a time much later than the opening of his life-work. It reads like a sort of introduction to the book as a whole. The references in it to invaders, and to widespread devastation, and the like, seem to indicate that it comes from the days of Sennacherib's invasion, nearly forty years after Isaiah had begun to prophesy.

The story of Isaiah really begins with chapter 6, where he tells of the vision that made or marked him a prophet.

The opening words, " In the year that King Uzziah died," read like a mere note of time. In reality we are sure they mean far more. The death of the king may have been a stunning blow to the young noble. Possibly he had thought of giving his life to a political career. It is altogether likely that he had a deep reverence for the old, strong king, who had done so much to advance the national welfare and prosperity. Even after Uzziah became a leper, and so was compelled to live in retirement, his son

Jotham acting as regent, there is reason to believe that Uzziah was still the controlling force in the life of the state. From the scanty bits of information available, it seems likely that Jotham was amiable but weak. We know that Isaiah distrusted Jotham's son, Ahaz, even from his childhood, and felt that he and his mother formed with others a sinister influence. So when the old king died, it was not only the young man's hero that had gone; much of his hope had gone also.

In depression of spirit he went up to the Temple. Those who passed through the courts that day may have looked curiously at the youth, sitting with rapt expression, all unconscious of what went on about him. We picture him waiting there until the evening sacrifice was over, and all had withdrawn, leaving him alone in the darkness of the evening. Then it seemed to him that he caught a vision of a greater King, One Who could never die or be disabled. " In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord, high and lifted up." The earthly king he had loved and trusted might die; Jehovah, Lord of Hosts, lived and reigned forever. The sweep of the royal, divine gar-

ment filled the Temple. Strange and glorious creatures stood in reverent awe, attendant on the mighty God of all. They sang one to another a hymn of such simple beauty that it has lingered on into the worship of the universal church:

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is Jehovah of Hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory."

The effect of this vision upon the sensitive soul of the young worshipper is deeply significant. Here dawns one of the cardinal ideas of the religion of the Spirit, the deep sense of sin and unworthiness, coupled with the assurance of divine cleansing. The youth is conscious most of his "unclean lips;" already he knew that his gift was that of speech, and there he would be pure and consecrated. Then comes the cleansing by fire from the altar, foreshadowing the spiritual fire of Pentecost. He hears the Lord calling for a volunteer: "Whom shall I send: and who will go for us?" Instantly, without waiting to hear what the errand is, or where to be performed, the youth cries out, "Here am I; send me!" He learns that no easy task lies before him. He must

speak the truth, and be mocked; must see men turn away from what he knows is their only hope of salvation. He can be no prophet of smooth things. Soberly, solemnly, he takes up the task of being a spokesman for God.

It is a wonderful chapter, decisive in its revelation of the essential inner character of spiritual religion. The sense of personal unworthiness, of the greatness and majesty of God, the cleansing touch of the fire of God, the offering of self to God's service, these are eternal elements in a true experience of religion.

Where shall the young prophet begin? What shall his testimony be?

We go back to the second chapter and follow through the opening part of the book. First of all we come upon a threefold vision of the city, which has served as a model for many a sermon and tract and poem.

First comes (2:1-4) the vision of the young dreamer, or idealist. He sees his city as potentially the mistress of mankind. All nations come to Zion for instruction and leading. There are noble and fine lines in the picture. War is to be done away; men are not even to *learn* war any more. Law and justice are to

be enthroned. It is a glorious vision, still unattained, yet drawing nearer to fulfilment as the nations come to Zion, to the unalterable principles and ideals of the God of the Hebrews, for their guidance. Yet we detect in this youthful vision something of the spirit of the American who believes that the peace of the world can best be secured and maintained if America simply exerts her strength to keep the peace.

We find this beautiful vision in the two books of Isaiah and Micah. It may be that neither borrowed from the other, that each of them caught up and used a popular and beautiful song of the time, exalting the future glory and greatness of Zion.

Then we come upon another vision, that of the disillusioned realist (2:6-4:1). He sees the city now not in the rosy mist of his dreams, but in cold fact, as it appears to one whose critical faculties are in full play. His heart sinks at the sight. Instead of the nations coming to Zion for light and leading, Zion goes to them, aping their ways, following their fashions. The land is full of foreign customs, foreign luxury, foreign gods. He breaks forth into a storm of

indignation and warning. A day of judgment is at hand. The warning is strikingly like that which Amos gave, solemn, terrifying, yet vague. God alone must be exalted. No other can be tolerated in His presence. Clearly Isaiah strikes one of his chosen notes, that of the sovereignty of God, the Holy One.

He shows one picture after another of the ruin and desolation that is coming. The able, the strong, the leaders, are swept away, until the few who remain desperately offer the government to the only man among them who still owns a coat; but that man refuses to be responsible for "this ruin" of a state. So few men will be left that seven women shall lay hold on one man, offering to share him with one another, each woman providing her own support.

He launches into a caustic attack on the women, reminding us of the outbreaking of the wrath of Amos against the "cows of Bashan." He sets forth with scorn their foolish following of silly fashions, their thoughtless extravagance and luxury and vanity. Only evil can come from such a spirit and such ways.

It is a gloomy, disheartening picture.

But there follows a third vision, one of hope,

through the purifying presence of God. It is a small, brief passage (4:2-6), with few details, but a clear forthsetting of lasting glory and security. This is the vision of the moral optimist, the man of faith. He sees the city redeemed and cleansed "by the spirit of justice and the spirit of burning." Then there shall be all through the life of Zion the beauty and strength that spring from goodness, justice, and true worship.

That is the vision which the man carried in his heart through all his long, hard, loyal life. Not the careless delight in outward splendour and unfounded hopes. Not the disheartened and cynical realization of the moral failure of the city as it is. But the strong faith that, through the grace of God, through discipline and purification, the city might yet be a City of God. Here in the three visions of the city, of the state, is noble teaching for citizens of every town and country. It lays hold on our hearts with peculiar power in these present days, when we see all about us the dreamy, impractical idealists, their heads lost in the clouds, their feet stumbling over little obstacles; and the disillusioned realists, keenly

alive to facts and tendencies and conditions, critical of everything, doubtful of the present and future; while now, as then, the hope of the future lies with the moral optimists, those who have courage and faith and consecration, so that they can face the facts at their worst, and still march on in hope.

The fifth chapter reads like a condensed analysis of some of Isaiah's addresses on outstanding social and religious problems. Here he appears as the social critic and reformer.

He begins with a song. It is not unlikely that he often would begin his appeals to the people in that way. It is a lovely song of a vineyard, which received solicitous care from its owner, but produced only wild grapes. One wonders if this may not have been a popular song, well known and often sung by the people, possibly a love-song, complaining of the coldness of the loved one. Whatever its original form, and wherever he found it, Isaiah makes it a vehicle for stern and lofty moral appeal. It is Judah and Jerusalem that form the vineyard of Jehovah. What more could have been done for them than He has done? Yet instead of the good clusters that should have been pro-

duced, wild grapes are found. "He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry."

It startles us, and sets us to thinking soberly about our boasted progress, when we find this prophet of twenty-seven centuries ago listing the evils that confronted the social order in his day, and including the very problems that still press for solution.

What are they? The Land Problem, the Liquor Problem, the Religious Problem. Already he has spoken of the War Problem, and he will speak of it again. These are still the major evils of the race, the stubborn questions not yet solved.

There is the *Land Problem* (5:8-10). Through the bounty of God, and the wide range of our national domain, we in America are comparatively free from that vexing problem. But how it has teased and cursed one nation after another! It is a live issue today in Britain, in Russia, in other lands. Nor are we wholly free from it in this country. "The conservation of national resources" is still a burning question. Still must governments fight the battle of the people against unscrupulous

private interests which would appropriate the land and its wealth to personal and corporate uses.

There is the *Liquor Problem* (5:11-16). Rich and poor, high and low, are swept by this curse into the open mouth of the grave. Befuddled with drink, the rulers and counsellors spend their time in indulgence, and the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

What is the solution? Isaiah saw it as a matter of individual action. His appeal was to the conscience of the citizen, to hold himself clear from this curse of drink. We have added government control, and now prohibition. But have we solved the problem? It is depressing to realize that this question, which is so clearly dealt with by this ancient reformer, is an outstanding issue in national elections. But still the ultimate appeal is that which Isaiah made, to the conscience of the individual. The gravest fact in America just now is not that the law is not being enforced, but that it has to be enforced; that men can allow themselves to break the law of the land for an indulgence which has always been a social detriment and curse.

The third outstanding problem with which Isaiah deals is that of irreligion, of the breakdown of moral standards and religious controls (5:18-24). Here again he might be addressing our generation, writing for one of our better magazines. With a few graphic touches he sets before us clear pictures of typical leaders in the revolt against religion and morality; the men who go out of their way to defy conventional ideas and accepted standards; the men who scoff at the notion of a personal God to whom they are responsible; the men content with a crass materialism; the men who challenge God, if there be a God, to do something striking in proof of His existence and power; the men who confuse moral distinctions, and offer specious pleas that good is evil and evil good, making a mock of all standards; the men content with their own approval, "wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight." We recognize them all; and all who believe in God and in simple goodness are fighting today against new incarnations of the same evil spirits.

Is it not impressive, and somewhat depressing, to find this social and religious reformer

of the dim past dealing with the very problems and evils we still must face?

We begin to wonder if mankind can ever learn, if any real progress is possible. Then we take heart as we realize that our hope is still where Isaiah's rested, in the Living and Holy God. "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this."

"Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are in vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

"If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Come silent, flooding in, the main.

"And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly.
But westward, look, the land is bright!"

V

THE STATESMAN: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF ISAIAH

V

THE STATESMAN: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF ISAIAH

WE pass on to watch the statesman-prophet as he faces the political questions of the time. The seventh and eighth chapters of the book of Isaiah give a clear picture of the crisis which confronted the little kingdom of Judah within ten years after Uzziah died, and of the bold fashion in which Isaiah played his part.

Ahaz was now the king; a weak man, the natural outgrowth of a spoiled childhood, lacking moral fibre and religious conviction. The two kingdoms to the north of Judah had formed a coalition in the vain hope of throwing off the yoke of Assyria. The history of Palestine for a century and more now becomes the story of repeated attempts of this hopeless and desperate nature. They sought to unite all the little countries of Palestine in a common opposition to Assyria. As Judah would

not join them, they began to exert military pressure to compel her to do so. Together they were much stronger than Judah, and it is not strange that Ahaz was deeply concerned.

There were two obvious courses he might take. One of them was to submit to his neighbours, and join them in defiance to Assyria. That would bring temporary relief, but a terrible danger of ultimate disaster. The other course was to appeal to Assyria for help, on the plea that Judah was being attacked because of her loyalty to that great empire. Ahaz was on the very point of taking the second course. Isaiah knew it, and dreaded such a decision. So far Judah had held aloof, being out of the direct road over which Assyria must march to world-dominion. It would be a deeply dangerous act to invite the intervention of so unscrupulous and mighty a power. Isaiah therefore espoused a third policy. Its motto was, "Stand fast, and trust in God." He saw that Ahaz might with reasonable safety meet the threats of the two neighbouring states, without calling in the dangerous help of Assyria.

Led by an inner conviction of the will and

word of Jehovah, Isaiah went up with his little son to face the king "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool." The weakness of Jerusalem in time of siege was the paucity of its water supply, and the vulnerability of its sources. Evidently Ahaz had gone out to inspect conditions at that important point. Isaiah faced him, with the clear exhortation not to be afraid, not to yield to the pressure of the two confederated nations, nor yet in panic to send for Assyrian help. "If ye will not believe," was his bold message, "ye shall not be established."

In sublime confidence that his message was from Jehovah, Isaiah offered to give a sign. He challenged the king to call for proof from God that the message of the prophet was from Him.

But Ahaz refused the test. He may have feared that the prophet would make good, in which case the king would have committed himself; or he may have had the realist's contempt for signs and wonders. In any event, he declined the challenge, piously declaring that he would not "tempt Jehovah." On the surface of the matter this was akin to the

answer Christ gave to the devil, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." But at heart how different!

Then the prophet speaks. Ahaz may refuse to call for a sign, but a sign he shall have. Yet is it to be no miracle, but rather an outworking of natural consequence, a sign in history, and that soon. A young woman now with child shall bear a son and call his name "God-with-us," a name full of hope and assurance for the future, a name of divine promise. And before that child is old enough to talk plainly, old enough to know right from wrong, the crisis will have passed, the two kings now so feared will have gone; and lasting woe and desolation will come upon Judah through the dangerous policy of calling upon Assyria for help. "The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, days that have not come,—even the King of Assyria."

We pause a moment to look at this famous prediction, generally taken by interpreters in the past as a prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah. There may be, probably there are, in it the germs of Messianic prophecy. This child to be born, with the wonderful name

of Immanuel, may be a foreshadowing of the Wonder-Child whose form and meaning and work grow more and more clear with the growth of prophecy. But it is only stating facts when we remind ourselves that the word used here to describe the mother is not the usual Hebrew word denoting a virgin, but is used to describe any young woman, unmarried or married; and that, very clearly, the meaning and force of the "sign" depend on the birth of that child within a year or two at the most. This particular passage can refer to the birth of Jesus, seven hundred years later, only in that large and vague way in which Old Testament prophecies stretch beyond their immediate application to foreshadow distant facts and ideals beyond their immediate significance.

We may be justified—I believe we are—in reading into Isaiah's words on this occasion a somewhat deeper meaning than that which lies on the surface. It is not unlikely that there existed at the time a tradition, a hope, that there would appear at some time, and might appear at any time, a hero like David, to fulfil the dreams of pious patriots, and set Jerusalem high in power and glory. Isaiah plainly warns

the king that the result of his weak and wrong plan to ask aid from Assyria may be to make impossible the fulfilment of this glorious ideal. The prince, the longed-for hero, will come, and find a ruined heritage, a hopeless task, a thwarted mission. Here is surely a foreshadowing of the distant future, when Immanuel did come, only to be rejected, and to find His mission thwarted, His heritage lost for Him.

The king would not hearken. He was set upon this evil policy of appealing to Assyria. He would provide for present safety; let the future look out for itself. Rejected by Ahaz, Isaiah turned to the people (8:1 *ff.*). It was a bold step to take, in days when kings were tyrants.

The prophet made a "tablet," and on it wrote in large letters words meaning: "Haste-prey! Speed-booty!" We imagine him setting up this striking sign in a public place, and watching as the crowd gathers and wonders. It was the equivalent, for that age of the modern expedient of placarding the city with a poster that excites curiosity. When the crowd is sufficiently interested, the prophet is there

to tell them what the slogan means. Again he refers to the "sign" of a child; but this time it is his own child, to whom he gives the name of "Haste-prey; Speed-booty," declaring that before the child can say "Mamma" and "Papa" the crisis will be over, and the King of Assyria will appear as the real danger.

Dramatically he pleads with the people. They are troubled about the small water supply, "the waters of Siloam that trickle softly." Well, they shall have water enough when the full current of the Euphrates is turned upon them. He pictures the Assyrian danger as a flood, overwhelming the land that should be "Immanuel's land." Then, in high and noble faith, and with inspired earnestness, he pleads with the people to trust in God, and do the right, and be unafraid (8:9-15). If they will look through the immediate dangers to the Lord of Hosts, fear Him only, and exalt Him in their hearts, they will be safe. He will be their rock of defence if they trust Him, a stone of stumbling if they distrust Him. The issue is clear.

But even as the king rejected the bold wisdom of the prophet's advice, so the people re-

fused to heed it. What more can the prophet do? Faced with this critical situation, he took a course prophetic of one of the chief principles of the religion of the Spirit—he turned to the few who would hear him, and began to build up in them a faith and a program in line with what he knew to be the truth of God (8:16-18). He has only gloomy forebodings for the mass of the people. They trust in superstitions, in magic and necromancy, rather than in the God of light and righteousness and holiness. There is no hope in them. So he turns to the "remnant" that will heed the message, clearly foreshadowing the way in which Jesus turned to the twelve, when the crowds fell away, entrusting His message and mission to those who had faith.

Gloomy as was the immediate prospect (8:21, 22), Isaiah never for a moment lost faith that the true day of God would dawn, when his hopes would be fulfilled. The climax of this great scene, or series of scenes forming one act in the drama of this man's life and service, is in a passage that has passed into that common use which is one with true immortality, linked inseparably with the joy and faith of

Christmas, known to all through the noble setting given it in the music of Handel (9:2-7). Here is a clear forthsetting of faith that a King is to come, who shall fulfil the promises made to David, bringing peace and security not to Israel alone, but to all men. The weapons of war shall no longer be needed; they shall be thrown in the garbage-heap, burned as refuse.

The Prince Who is surely to come shall have four splendid names, "Wonder of a Counsellor," "Divine Hero," "Eternal Father," "Prince of Peace." There is some question as to the original significance of these titles; but there can be not the slightest doubt that they describe One far above ordinary men, and even ordinary heroes, One who truly represents the glory of God Himself. Then follows a significant saying, one of those rare passages in which eternal wisdom finds its setting: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end." Thus to associate "peace" with "government" is to learn the very lesson the world is just beginning rather timidly to put into practice—that peace depends on the substitution of legal and governmental processes for war. Clear and splendid,

also, is the prophet's statement of the only true basis for such hopes: "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this." It is only through faith in God that we can have faith in the future of human civilization.

We cannot take time and space to follow through the prophecies of this man of God in detail. We must refer those who would know them to the many good commentaries, notably that of George Adam Smith, which is still indispensable and unique. The remainder of the ninth chapter is a tragic but noble meditation on the sad fate that fell upon the Northern Kingdom when the Assyrian came down upon it. The eleventh chapter gives an exquisite picture of the Golden Age that will come when God's Chosen Prince appears, a picture that has held all its beauty of meaning and freshness of colour down through the centuries. One simple saying from it voices one of the deepest principles of the advance of humanity and of the Kingdom of God: "A little child shall lead them." The very spirit of modern education, and of the Christian religion, is in those words; yes, the full promise of the vision with which this glorious bit of prophecy closes,

the vision of a world full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

There follow collected bits of prophecy about the surrounding nations, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and even about distant Egypt and Babylon. Out from these stands one startling prediction, so deep in meaning, so modern in application, so one at heart with the best thought and feeling of the highest idealism of our time, that we cannot leave it unmentioned. In the nineteenth chapter, Isaiah confidently predicts that the Egyptians shall yet be won to the true worship and faith of Jehovah and that, in time, there shall be a "high way" between Egypt and Assyria, and a community of life and worship between these two fiercely contending empires; while little Israel shall share with them on equal terms, the blessing of the true God resting on all of them, Egypt, Assyria, and Israel, for all of them are His people.

Here emerge, perhaps for the first time in all literature, the clear vision of world-unity, the sure promise of success in the missionary enterprise of the true religion, the definite indication of the right way to a unified world, through intercourse, through setting up broad

highways instead of big, high walls, " boulevards " in place of " bulwarks," a "boulevard " being defined as " a broad thoroughfare occupying the site of demolished fortifications."

We note, in chapter twenty, that Isaiah through the years steadfastly adhered to his " foreign policy " of avoiding " entangling alliances," going to the extreme of making a public exhibition of himself, as a sign and protest, a warning of the danger that would come from Assyria.

One stirring passage stands out so definitely that it demands at least a glance. It is chapter twenty-eight, in which Isaiah points the moral of the fall of Samaria, and shows us graphically the difficulty he encountered in getting the leaders of his own city to heed his messages from God. He opens with a lament for the " fading flower of the glorious beauty " of that kingdom upon which had come so swiftly the utter destruction predicted by Amos.

But the men of the Southern Kingdom, not yet visited with such calamities, will not heed the lesson. They go their careless way, drinking and carousing, seeking their own advantage, oppressing the poor, trusting in their

secret understandings with Egypt, continuing in the very ways that had brought upon their neighbours and kinsmen to the north this terrible tragedy.

Then he shows us these reckless, insolent leaders with whom he has to deal. We hear them mocking the stern prophet (28:9, 10): "Does he think he is teaching children, with his 'line upon line, precept upon precept'?" Bitterly he answers, "If you are weary of these plain and direct words, God has other teachers, through whom He will force you to learn; men from afar who will teach you terrible lessons, if you will not heed the straight and simple messages of God. You think you are safe because of shrewd political understandings and alliances. There is no safety but in true faith in God. Your alliances shall be swept away. You will find yourselves like men trying to rest on beds too small, with coverings too narrow. He only finds rest who trusts in God and works righteousness."

It is a great chapter, of living value so long as men prefer cheap political expedients to courses of righteousness, and trust in shrewd selfish policies rather than in God and His

eternal principles of truth and justice. We like to recall the use Cromwell made of it when, in 1650, he wrote to certain small ecclesiastical politicians, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken. I pray you to read the twenty-eighth of Isaiah, from the fifth to the fifteenth verses."

Passing by many details over which we would like to linger, among them some rare bits of inspired prophecy and poetry, we come to the outstanding crisis of 701 B. C., in which Isaiah played a true hero's part. In between the earlier events and prophecies and this late climax of his power and activity lie some golden years, during which there was on the throne a king after Isaiah's own heart, one who trusted in Jehovah, and lived in the "quietness and confidence" which the statesman-prophet said was the secret of strength. All who love and honour Isaiah must rejoice that there came into the middle of his stormy life this time of calm satisfaction.

But after some fourteen years of Hezekiah's reign came another sharp crisis, more threatening in its outward form than any which Judah had yet been called upon to face. Palestine

rebelled against the Assyrian overlord, and Sennacherib, then on the throne of that mighty empire, led a strong force to punish the rebels and to overcome Egypt, always a prime mover and instigator of such revolts. We are concerned not with the details of the campaign, but only with Isaiah's relation to the events. We find in certain chapters of his book plain indications of his attitude, and clear reflections of his impressions and convictions.

It is easy for those who read the Biblical account, unsupplemented by further knowledge of the history of the time, to think of Sennacherib as leading his whole army to the siege of Jerusalem, and being attacked by "the angel of the Lord" immediately outside the walls of the sacred city. In fact, however, Judea and Jerusalem formed a side-issue. Sennacherib and his army overran Judah, shutting up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage," as the Assyrian monarch put it in one of his records, and then passed on to invade Egypt, sending a detachment to demand the surrender of Jerusalem. When this was refused, he uttered dire threats of what he would do on his return from Egypt. But on the bor-

ders of that kingdom, his host was smitten with a plague, so that he was forced to withdraw in haste, leaving Jerusalem free from the threatened danger.

One incident in the story is worthy of note, for Isaiah refers to it. The Assyrians agreed to leave the city alone if a huge ransom was paid. By great efforts, the sum was raised and paid over; then the invader basely broke his word, and demanded the surrender of the city. It seems clear that this dishonourable act helped to strengthen Isaiah's conviction that God must be against such a treacherous power, and made him the more insistent on a policy of defiance.

In the twenty-second chapter we catch a vivid picture of the city in the turmoil and confusion of the first phase of the invasion. There is perplexity, terror, quick shifting of official leaders, hasty but hopeless rallying of the armed forces, desperate efforts to protect the water-supply, long-neglected (verses 1-11). Then we see the revulsion of feeling and conduct as the invading force is withdrawn. Instead of giving thanks to God, bowing in penitence, imploring the blessing of the Most High,

there is a carnival of feasting, rioting, and indulgence (verses 12, 13). As the prophet watches this scene, there forms in his soul a conviction that such a nation cannot endure, that the judgment of God will surely be visited upon it (verse 14). This chapter is a noble bit of caustic realism.

In chapter thirty-three, also, we feel sure we have an echo of the facts and feelings of this critical time, coming from the end, when the danger is over. The chapter opens with exultant triumphing over the treacherous invader, who gave his word and then broke it; but quickly this feeling gives way to joy and praise and wonder at the great things Jehovah has wrought. Vividly the prophet recalls the days of terror and foreboding now happily past (verses 7-12). He glows in the demonstration that God is in and with the true and upright, and will support and defend them (13-16). He reminds the people with what dismay they looked from the walls upon the fierce, strange forms and faces of the foreign invaders, and with what sinking of heart they heard them state their insolent and crushing demands (verses 18, 19). All this is past and over, he

cries. The king is safe; the land is free; God has saved His people. And the chapter ends in a beautiful picture of Zion saved, strong, noble, uplifted, through the goodness and glory of her God. It is an inspiring passage.

We must not leave out the stirring poem found in the tenth chapter. Whether or not it comes from this particular period, it fits into it wonderfully.

The prophet throws his challenge in the face of the invading host (10:5). He sees the horde of Assyrians sweeping over the face of the earth, spreading terror and dismay everywhere, swallowing up kingdoms, determined to wreak its will on all the earth. But the prophet is not dismayed. With an amazing leap of faith he sees the haughty king of Assyria as a mere tool in the hand of the God of all the earth, a rod, a staff, a scourge sent of God for the accomplishment of His holy will. The Assyrian does not see this. He thinks himself lord of all, his own master. The prophet describes his boastings (verses 7-11, 13, 14). But, with unshaken and unshakable confidence, this lonely watcher in his obscure city penetrates the folly of the Assyrian insolence. It is

as if an axe or a saw took to itself the credit rightly belonging to the workman who wields it (verse 15). In a tone which anticipates the triumph he knows is coming, Isaiah declares that when God has finished using the Assyrian monarch, He will cast him aside, or break him like a tool no longer needed (verses 12, 16-19), and the people of God shall be saved, and learn to trust in their God (verses 20-27).

There is nothing in all literature more striking, more full of vigour and movement, more splendidly dramatic, than the climax of this great chapter. Isaiah sees the invader rapidly moving through the country, from one point to another, apparently irresistible, until he confronts the holy city, and shakes his fist at it (28-32). Then he falls, as some great tree falls in the forests of Lebanon.

It was a great deliverance. It set the man of God high in prestige and influence. He had been calm and sure when all were in a panic of fear. And his faith had been justified by the event. A century later, when Nebuchadnezzar invested the city, men harked back to Isaiah's sublime assurances, and claimed immunity again, without the moral and religious basis

for their confidence which he had had; and they saw their city fall. It was no blind trust in magic, it was daring confidence in the ultimate triumph of righteousness and truth, that shone out at this dramatic moment in Isaiah's career.

For about a dozen years more there was peace and joy in the little kingdom, with growing influence for the man of God. Then came the bitter reaction, a lapse into idolatry and iniquity under Manasseh. Nothing sure is known of the end of Isaiah's long and noble life. Tradition holds that he was martyred in the reactionary period.

What magnificent contributions this great soul made to "the religion of the Spirit"!

He took up, and emphasized, and made more glorious, the original message of Amos, that God can be pleased only with *righteousness*, and that worship is of no importance, or is even displeasing to God, if unaccompanied by righteousness, in personal character, and in social relations. He was a greater social reformer than Amos himself, better balanced, and no less strong and inflexible.

We find little in Isaiah of Hosea's great con-

ception of the love of God, save as a spirit diffused through much of his teaching. But he added a majestic note of his own, that of the holiness and majesty and sovereignty of God, and of the vital importance of personal fellowship with the High and Holy One.

Here we come upon the great truth which underlies the religion of the Spirit. It is the chief characteristic of evangelical Protestant Christianity that it exalts the fellowship of the individual soul with God. It insists on the greatness, and majesty, the sovereignty of God; and then dares summon every man to enter into a personal experience of fellowship with Him. This basic idea of the religion of the Spirit comes to clear statement first in Isaiah. It is his great contribution to religion.

He also is the first to give clear expression to the idea of a fellowship of faith. His "remnant," held together as the true people of God by their common faith, worship, and loyalty, is the germ of the central Christian idea of the "Holy Catholic Church."

The underlying thought in Isaiah's conception of religion comes out clearly in a little touch in the opening words of the story of his

call (chapter 6). "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw *also* the Lord." Others saw only the diseased, dying king, the clouds and doubts and dangers. This man saw "*also*" the Lord. Always he saw through the facts to the Lord behind the facts, using the facts to bring about His great and glorious will. This vision it was that cleared his sense of moral values and religious realities, and political principles. He always saw God. And so he always saw clearly and rightly. He was one of the earliest of the wholesome mystics, the "godly men of the world" who have been the noblest leaders of the life of humanity.

More clearly than anyone who had been before him, this man saw the beauty and necessity of that blending of confidence and reverence in man's approach to God which alone can make man's intercourse with the Eternal right and pure. In his vision, the Seraphim had four wings for reverence, and two for service. His religion was characterized by the very spirit which meets us in the opening words of the Lord's Prayer, in which we confidently call God "Our Father," and then at once pray, "Hallowed be thy name."

This man's religion made God very great, and then brought Him very near, to reason with men, to forgive them, to guide them, to inspire them (1:18).

Here, then, the outlines of the religion of the Spirit begin to appear distinctly. The vision of the Holy and Sovereign God, the sense of personal sinfulness, the cleansing and forgiveness, the eagerness to serve, the ethical cleanness, the unswerving loyalty, the passion for social righteousness, the fellowship of believers, the hope for the future Kingdom—all of this so characteristic of spiritual religion at its best, is found in the words and spirit of this man of God. Surely the Spirit of the Living God spoke through this man in words that shall never die, but shall live and bear fruit in one age after another, until his own glorious vision is fulfilled, of a world filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

VI

THE TRIBUNE: MICAH

VI

THE TRIBUNE: MICAH

ONCE more we come upon an obscure book, written by a man of whom we know little. Not even in his writings do we find very much on which to base an accurate judgment of his character and temperament. We call him "The Tribune," and there is that in his character and attitude as here revealed which warrants our classing him with those "Tribunes of the People" who filled so important a place in the story of ancient Rome. His sympathy is wholly, and passionately, with the down-trodden. He does not consort with kings and leaders in the political and social life of the nation, as does his noble contemporary, Isaiah. He distrusts them and holds aloof from them. He is one of that interesting company of thorough democrats who tend to idealize the plain people, and suspect, or distrust, all who have wealth or power or social prestige.

The book of Micah is confused, and hard to

understand. It is doubtful if the ordinary intelligent reader would get any very clear notion of the meaning and message of the book, through unaided reading of it. Here and there we come upon luminous bits. There are some magnificent passages. But as a whole it is confused, opaque, hard to grasp.

Such a book may well lead us to question seriously the practical value of that extreme doctrine of literal inspiration which some good people feel called to defend with vigour and positiveness. When so much of the material in the Bible is, as here, confused, difficult to comprehend, and obviously meant for its own time, so filled with allusions to contemporary matters that a considerable part of it is now unintelligible, it seems unimportant, to say the least, whether or no we accept the theory that all these obscure details and parts are infallibly accurate. Why be concerned about a particular theory which, practically, means no more than that, if we could understand what all these verses and passages mean, we could be sure that their meaning is conveyed without error?

Belief in the inspired character and author-

ity of the Bible as a whole, in the absolute guidance of the Spirit of God all through the long process of progressive revelation, is a valuable and essential part of the Christian faith. But to claim inerrant authority for every word, where so many words have no clear meaning, is to claim something which can have at best only a theoretical and academic value. Moreover, such a theory exposes us to a very real danger, that of attempting to find in these obscure passages hidden meanings, allegorical interpretations. This has ever been a dangerous tendency. All sorts of eccentric cults have based themselves on private interpretations of obscure passages.

The magnificent statement of faith in the Scriptures found in the first chapter of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*—unsurpassed in all creedal literature for combined majesty and clarity—is nowhere nobler than in its positive repudiation of all such fanciful treatment of the Word of God. It affirms that "the true sense of Scripture is not manifold, but one." This commits us rightly to the plain, obvious meaning of every passage, and gives a direct incentive to careful, critical study of the Bible.

And wherever, as in much of this book, the plain and simple sense is so hard, or so impossible, to discover, we may well afford to disregard the academic question of all-embracing inerrancy, thanking God that there is in the Bible as a whole so much that is clearly and indubitably from Him, with the seal of His authority plainly stamped on it, that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein," but can find without fail the way of life.

There is much, however, that is comparatively clear and certain, as we study this book, enough to make us deeply grateful for the man and his message.

The style is of interest. We see at once that this man was a countryman, with something of the roughness and crudity, and the instinct for hard facts, which the farmer is apt to show. There is in him little, if any, of the sensitive poetic nature so marked in the character of Hosea. Nor is he imaginative and lofty, like his near neighbour, Isaiah. He is plain and straightforward. The obscurity of his writing is largely due to his absorbed interest in the facts of his own time.

There is an uncouthness about his style here and there. He indulges in plays on words so obvious and clumsy that they recall Shakespeare's laboured and wearisome punning. In the first chapter, when he is describing the imminent fall of the Northern Kingdom, a catastrophe so dire that it leads him to extravagant expressions of mourning and lamentation (1:9), he does not hesitate to introduce puns which, to speak frankly, are clumsy and hardly appropriate. "Tell it not in Tell-town. Shed tears at Tear-town. Roll in the dust at Dust-town. Give a parting-gift to Gift-town. Fare forth, O Fare-town. Stir-town, dare not stir. Harness your horses, O Horse-town. Bitter-town, look for bitterness. The kings of Israel shall be balked at Balk-town." Ingenious use of the names of these places, Gath, Bochim, Beth-le-Aphrah, Shaphir, Lachish, Achzib, and the rest; but it strikes us as scarcely suited to the occasion. It is not easy to imagine Isaiah writing in this way while lamenting the terrible fate of the northern tribes.

The countryman is plainly revealed in his distrust and dislike toward the cities. "The sin of Israel is Samaria: and the sin of Judah

is Jerusalem" (1:5). It seemed clear to him that the vice and wickedness and irreligion of the time was concentrated in the crowded centres of population. His attitude is that of the rural dwellers today and at all times, inclined to think of the great cities as sinks of iniquity, Babylons rather than cities of God. This man is revealed as distrustful of the "big men" of his nation, suspicious of the integrity and trustworthiness of the leaders. In his vision of the triumph of Zion, he sees seven shepherds acting as leaders, along with eight princes (5:5). He also sees the chosen leader of the victorious forces, the saviour of the nation, coming, not from Jerusalem, the capital city, but from the little town of Bethlehem, whence David, the shepherd-lad, had come, to be the hero of the Hebrew people (5:2-4).

The countryman may be more nearly right than the city-dweller in his social judgments, in his trusts and distrusts. At least he is different. And these two near neighbours in time and space, Isaiah and Micah, stand forth as types of the distinction to be found in every country and in every age, between the men who, on the whole, glorify the town and despise

or ignore the rural places; and the men who magnify the virtue and strength of country life and distrust or condemn the great cities.

What are the main lines on which the message of Micah moves?

It is very clear that he is a social reformer. The passion for social justice is as keen and unquenchable in him as it was in Amos, even more intense than in Isaiah, if possible. Those who protest against the "social wants that sin against the strength of youth," who will not be still in the presence of injustice, inequality, and unfair conditions in the social order, have the prophets at their back, this man Micah not least of them all. He insists that religion, if it is to be real and worthy, must work itself out through right social institutions. Religion to him means justice, integrity, fair dealing, restraint in the use of power, equity and generous consideration in all dealings between man and man.

He deals hard blows at the abuses of his time. What are they? One of them is *the unscrupulous use of power.* "Woe unto them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds; and when the morning comes, they prac-

tise it, because it is in the power of their hand." Was there ever a more concise and sharply defined description of the domineering, overbearing man, who does as he pleases because he has the opportunity to do it, and turns all his power of position and prestige and resources to his own selfish aggrandizement? How to deal with such men is still a tough problem.

There is *cruel oppression of the poor.* "They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" (2:2). Bitterly he reproaches the leaders for evicting the poor from their homes, taking from them their very garments, giving the children no opportunity for a fair and happy life (2:8, 9). Few invectives can be found more bitter and biting than that which he launches against the rulers of Jacob and Israel (3:1-4). He sees them as greedy devourers of the plain people, cannibals who eat the very flesh of their neighbours.

There is a *lamentable lack of integrity,* a general untrustworthiness, which he deplores and castigates. "The rich men are full of vio-

lence, and the people are deceitful" (6:12). "The godly man is perished out of the land, not an honest soul remains. Everyone lurks for bloodshed, each man preys upon his fellows. They have quick fingers for foul play. The best of them are no better than briars. The straightest are like thorns twisted in a hedge. Do not think you can trust your fellow, or confide in a friend. No one can be trusted" (7:2-5). There is a very modern sound about his complaint that the young people have got quite out of hand; "sons insult their fathers, girls defy their mothers" (7:6).

There is *widespread irreligion,* of a scornful and reckless type. Worst of all, some who pose as religious leaders deny their professions by their greedy, indecent lives. Idolatry is prevalent, and every sort of superstition, witchcraft and soothsaying (3:5-8; 5:12-14).

Most caustic and severe is his indictment of the false prophets, and of the leaders who will not let a true messenger from God speak the truth the times demand. "Talk like that, and you cut yourself off from the true fellowship of God," they say. "Such harping is not prophecy. Talk about God's goodness. Say smooth

and pleasant things." With bitter intensity he denounces the false prophets, who suit their messages to their interests, who cry "Peace," but are ready to bite all those who will not feed them (3:5-7). What a vivid picture: "Judges passing verdicts for a bribe, priests pattering oracles for pay, prophets divining for money and all the while relying on the Eternal" (3:1).

Over against all these untrustworthy, hypocritical leaders stands the true man of God, conscious of his integrity, and knowing that God is with him. "As for me, I am full of strength and skill and courage, inspired by the eternal, to let Jacob know its crimes, and Israel its sins" (3:8). False religion and true here stand in sharp contrast; and the mark of the true is ethical integrity, courage and unflinching truthfulness in setting forth clearly good and evil, truth and falsehood.

There is *greedy corruption* in Church and state, which this tribune of the people treats with withering scorn. We feel sure that the leaders of that time called him by the equivalent in the language of the day of our term "muck-raker." We hear them denouncing

him as a defamer of his country, one whose mouth should be stopped. What a picture, drawn in a few swift strokes, of the ever-present working of corruption: "The prince asks; and the judge looks for a reward; and the great man, he says what he wants; thus they weave it together" (7:3). Every age faces that problem, of the web, the system, whereby strong and unscrupulous men use the social order for their own advantage, and defy the forces that make for righteousness.

What is the remedy for these evil conditions? Sometimes it seems as if there is none; only disaster and destruction can await such decadent conditions (3:12). Yet there are deep-lying, unconquerable principles and forces, on which good and true men can depend; and they will ultimately bring forth justice to victory. This man, for all his gloomy outlook, is as sure as Isaiah himself of the glorious outcome of it all; and his trust, like that of his neighbour up in the capital, is in the working of the Spirit of God.

He is very sure of God's righteous judgments. Though men despise or defy them, they will move on to victory.

He has high hopes for the Kingdom of God, which shall come with power.

We find him singing the same patriotic hymn that Isaiah records, of the day when all nations shall turn to Zion for instruction and guidance, when the dominion shall have come to the "daughter of Jerusalem" (4:1-8). This and other prophecies of the coming of the Kingdom of God are tinged, or even highly colored, with intense nationalism. To this man the victory of God was synonymous with the triumph of his own race, though here and there are implications of more generous expectations for all mankind. He sees Assyria very sharply and definitely as the enemy that must be met. And, despite the overwhelming might of the great empire, he seems confident that, by the grace of God, the Hebrew people can overcome, when the test comes. Perhaps he was right. Who can say what might have come to pass, had Israel been wholly faithful to Jehovah, their God?

Out of the fifth chapter stands forth a noble picture of a coming hero. Micah seems to expect him very shortly. He shall lead the armies of Israel to victory over the invading

hosts of Assyria, and carry war and its devastation to the very gates of Nineveh itself. But in this vision of a conqueror are certain touches that suggest a greater hero, the Christ Who won not by might, nor by power, but by Spirit. He comes from Bethlehem, this Hero. He comes in fulfilment of ancient hopes. He shall be a Shepherd of God's flock. He shall be great even unto the ends of the earth. Noblest of all is the simple assurance: "And this Man shall be our peace." He has the power to unite classes, to unify discordant groups in a common loyalty. Here, plainly, is a foreshadowing of the Messiah, Who came in the fulness of time, to be just such a representative of God.

Clear and noble is this prophet's utter confidence in God, as the only ground of hope for good to come. "As for me, I will look unto Jehovah. I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me" (7:7). In all the Bible are few nobler bits of inspired meditation than that which closes this book: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth over the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in

lovingkindness. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the lovingkindness to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (7:18-20). Here is true inspired prophecy, very confident of good to come, because very sure of the unchangeable goodness of the Living God. This man Micah is worthy of a high place among those who lead mankind in the ways of God.

But his highest and noblest distinction lies in his clear vision and perfect statement of essential religion. In all literature there is no sentence which puts more simply and more perfectly the inner meaning of the life God would have man live than the eighth verse of the sixth chapter of Micah. It is one of the greatest sayings of all time.

The gem has a setting worthy of its brilliance. It is a drama of the life of the Spirit, this opening part of the sixth chapter of Micah. The scene is set, as in the opening chapter of Isaiah, for a trial at the bar of eternal justice. The mountains and hills are called to be judges

of the case between Jehovah and His people. God presents His indictment. What is there in which He has failed them? Let them recall all His mercies and righteous acts in their behalf. Why, then, do they desert Him, and weary of His service? There is a personal note struck in this plea that makes it the cry of a wounded heart, rather than the cold, merciless indictment of a prosecutor (6:1-5).

The people answer. They seem bewildered. What is it that God wants of them? Are they not offering sacrifices sufficient in number and value? Does God want them to revert to the dreadful offerings of human life? Shall they bring their children and offer their blood to appease the demands of God? "Tell us," they seem to cry, "only tell us what God wants, and we will bring it, cost what it may." We seem, as we read the words, to see the long procession of the seekers after God, with their gifts and sacrifices, the shedding of blood, the pageants and solemn rites. What is it that God wants?

Then comes the answer of eternal truth and light, giving the unchangeable demands of God: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." You do not need to ask. Your forms

and sacrifices, your questionings and speculations, there are all attempts to get away from the simple, basic requirements which you know in your heart to be what God requires. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

There it is! This man may be the least of the four. He may seem to plod his way where the others mount up with wings as eagles. But to him it was given through the inspiration of God to state as no other has ever done the simple, majestic, unalterable essentials of true religion. He gathers up into a single sentence the gist of the messages of the other three. The keynote of Amos's teaching is *justice.* Hosea strikes the richer, deeper note of *love.* Isaiah calls for reverent, humble *fellowship* with the Holy One. These are their characteristic messages. Micah includes them in one great statement, "to do justly, to love kindness, to walk humbly with thy God."

"The Religion of the Spirit" has dawned. It is still a long way to the fulness of noon; but the true light is shining, and shall shine more and more unto the perfect day in Christ Jesus.

VII

THE GROWTH OF THE RELIGION OF THE SPIRIT

VII

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WE have had the privilege of watching the dawn of that "Religion of the Spirit" in which is the hope of man's soul. Our study has been hasty and incomplete. We have not begun to plumb the depths of thought and feeling and experience which are to be found in the writings of these four great men of God who lived and suffered and saw and taught twenty-seven centuries ago. But even through so imperfect and fragmentary a study, something of the grandeur of their souls and of their visions has shone upon us. In the face of the crude religion of the time, of priestliness and ritual that too readily degenerated into formalism and superstition; of prophetism that was often but crass magic and fortune-telling; of piety that had no clear connection with personal conduct or with social relations; of practical unbelief lurking

beneath the mask of outward devoutness; there shone forth this clear, radiant light of pure and undefiled religion.

Whence did it come, if not from God Himself? And it is all the more surely from the Living God for being so intimately connected with the life of the time, for being an interpretation of current events, and yet, all through, so clear an exposition of eternal principles. Harnack has defined religion as "eternal life, in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God." Nowhere in the history of man's soul, save in our Lord Christ Himself, is there a clearer demonstration of the beauty and power of such religion, than in the spirit and the words of these prophets of the Dawn of the Religion of the Spirit.

What are the main lines of this Religion of the Spirit, as they appeared in the teachings of these four great men of God? How much of their teaching is still valid? How far are we "the children of the prophets"? Do we hold the same great eternal principles of religion which they so nobly held?

These are the chief notes of the religion set

forth and defended by the prophets of the eighth century before Christ:

1. *Reality.* The four prophets are conspicuous among the leaders of man's mind and soul for the courage and inflexible honesty with which they faced facts, and compelled other men to face them. Theirs was the ideal so nobly phrased by a noted preacher of the nineteenth century: "To dare to gaze on the splendour of naked truth, without putting a false veil before it to terrify with mystery and vagueness." They "would not make their judgment blind." Political dangers, social evils, moral principles, religious ideals, details of conduct and great philosophic and religious principles, they saw them all with crystal vision, because they had eyes single to the glory of God.

2. *Ethical Soundness and Strictness.* They had only scorn for subterfuges, excuses, compromises. They saw clearly and taught unmistakably that the only thing that matters very much is *righteousness, conduct,* and that there could be no substitute for it. They cried out, in the name of the God they knew and served so well, "What to me is the multitude

of your sacrifices? Wash you, make you clean. Do justice. Relieve the oppressed." "Establish justice in the gate; let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

3. *Distrust of Form, Ritual, and Tradition.* Always they faced the most pretentious of ancient claims in the spirit which "asks the title-deeds." Boldly they challenged the claim of elaborate systems of form and ceremony to come down with divine authority from the time of Moses. They poured forth withering scorn on the futile attempts to reach God and please Him with sacrifices and ceremonies. They had a wholesome distrust of the professional ecclesiastic, priest or prophet. They relied most of all on the direct and present leadership of the Spirit of God. Forms, creeds, all the outward part of religion, which bulks so large in the estimates of many, meant little to them.

4. *The Social Emphasis.* This is marked and strong all through their writings. To them religion is, and must be, intimately concerned with such matters as justice and injustice, political integrity and corruption,

intemperance, prostitution, ownership and use of the land, care of children and of the helpless, property rights, human rights, education, the home. As they saw it, one could not be religious unless he was right on these matters, and vitally concerned to make society right with reference to them all. And ever before them shone brightly a vision of a coming time when, through the power of God, and the leadership of Some-One Whom He would choose and send and anoint, humanity would be free from its curses, when war and exploitation and injustice should be things of the past, and all should dwell in joy and peace and godliness.

5. *Universality.* The God of these men is a God of all men. Here dawns a new idea. Any righteous people will be a chosen people of God. There is room for all races and classes within the scope of God's great plans and beneficent purposes. Egypt and Assyria will be one with Israel as the favoured of God. Here first emerged the conception of a religion for all the world, a religion that could not be satisfied if restricted, but must spread until it should fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

An essential part of this vision of a religion

for all men is the new conception of a voluntary religious community, held together by a common faith, a common spirit, and common ideals, the germ-idea of the central Christian conception of the Universal or Catholic Church.

6. *The Primacy of Personal Experience.* This may be regarded as the most essential of all their leading ideas and faiths. To these men religion is essentially personal fellowship with God. To be right with God is the supreme consideration. And that rightness must be one, not primarily of correct form, or of correct creed, but of heart and will and life. Here we find the very core of their teaching. Be right with God, through penitence, forgiveness, forsaking evil, doing well, prayer, fellowship, loyalty to God in all conduct, seeking His kingdom in all the outworkings of social life; so, and only so, shall you find true religion.

That Religion of the Spirit has never died. Through many vicissitudes and struggles, under varying forms and changes, it has come down through the ages, becoming clearer, stronger, more commanding, the hope of the spirit of man.

It has had to fight for its life again and again. Always the chief opposing forces have been the very ones which Amos and his followers had to face. Always there has been the unbeliever, sometimes openly scoffing, again hiding beneath a mask of piety, but always sceptical toward God and cynical toward men. The forces of materialism and godlessness have never died out. Always there has been the priest, with his ceremonialism, his sacramentarianism, his conviction that the essence of religion is to be found in conformity to established ritual. Always there has been the scribe, the traditionalist, with his documents, his creeds, his authoritative orthodoxies. Too often these have distrusted and attacked the religion of the Spirit. So long as all these have been content to be servants of that religion of personal fellowship with God, they have been good and helpful. But whenever and wherever they have been set up as authoritative, to say to the spirit of man in its quest for God, "Thus far, and no farther," they have formed a danger and a snare.

These men of God seem to have made little impression in their own age. Isaiah for a time

came near to carrying his nation on with him into the courageous adventure of living freely with God. Yet he had to fall back upon a "remnant"; and a violent reaction followed his temporary success. Nothing is surer, as one studies the history of man's spiritual life, than that the way of spiritual religion is hard, and must be climbed and fought step by step. The forces of unbelief, of superstition, of traditionalism, surged around these four great men, and submerged their pure religion of the spirit beneath the stormy waves of a muddy sea.

But nothing is more magnificent in the Bible than the ever-recurring evidence that the God of the Bible is the "Living God." Readers of Lewis Browne's *This Believing World* are struck with the sad monotony of the process by which one religion after another has flamed up and then died out. But the religion of Israel has had a unique power of finding new life. Again and again it has arisen from the ashes, new and radiant. It so appeared in Jeremiah and the Great Prophet of the Exile, the same spiritual religion as that proclaimed by Isaiah and his contemporaries, but enriched

by new visions of the significance of the individual, of the new covenant of God written on the heart, of the glory of vicarious suffering. Once again, in that period of the exile, shone out in clear radiance the religion of the Spirit.

But again the priest asserted himself, until Judaism became a thing of rule and rote, of scribe and priest, of code and creed.

Yet God did not leave Himself without witness at any time. That most precious part of the Old Testament, the book of Psalms, bears priceless evidence that the religion of the Spirit never quite failed. Always there were souls that knew that God could be pleased only with right hearts and true lives. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will"; there is the very spirit of the Prophets of the Dawn.

Then came Jesus. He found much of the true religion of the Spirit, living in humble souls, in the hearts of the people. But everywhere in evidence and in control He found the ecclesiastic, the traditionalist, the unbeliever, under the new names of Pharisee, Scribe, and Sadducee. He set free again among men the

religion of the Spirit. He called men to come to God freely as to a Father and a Friend. He made pre-eminent the rights and claims of justice and love. He taught an ethic that had at its heart a warmth of love for God and man. He taught the universal character of the true religion; the simplicity of the life of faith, prayer, repentance, doing of the will of God, love, brotherliness.

Above all, He lived as He taught and died as He lived. By His death and resurrection He set the seal of God on the religion of the Spirit. His great followers, Paul and John, developed the religion of the Spirit to a richness compared with which the teachings of Amos and his fellows was but as the first streak of dawn compared with the glory of the sun at noon.

Yet the tide swept in again, the tide of scepticism and ceremonialism, and traditionalism. Once more we see the unbeliever, the traditionalist, and the mystery-monger, doing their worst to hide from men the pure religion of the Spirit in which is life. Never can it be wholly quenched. It shines out in great lives, and breaks forth in the Reformation, but never

fully. It is depressing to see how quickly each new upflaming of the sacred fire of the Spirit dies down into the ashes of formalism and authoritarianism.

What of our own day? One hesitates to express a judgment, knowing well that his own prejudices and convictions will warp and bias his mind. Yet it does seem that certain tendencies in our modern Christianity at its best are quite one with the great principles and ideals of the religion of the prophets.

We note the same forces present and active today which, at the beginning, and all the way along, have forced the religion of the Spirit to fight for its life. There is a great and powerful development of unbelief. Many are crowding the path of naturalism and materialism. Intoxicated with the new revelations of physical science, and the splendour of invariable law, it is fatally easy for men to see no place for God, no use for religion, to doubt everything that lies beyond the reach of the senses and the instruments that serve them. Over at the other extreme stand, now as of old, the dogmatists, crying out that the only safety lies in asking for the old ways and walking therein,

declaring that one must choose between the perilous byway of unbelief and their own particular path of an unchanging and rigid faith. And now, as formerly, the byway of ceremonialism opens alluringly, offering to souls in doubt the satisfaction of æsthetic emotionalism, the opiate of sacramental mysteries.

Still stretches straight before us the clear path of spiritual religion. The one blessed reality in which men have always found salvation, joy, and peace, is just that vital experience of fellowship with God and man, a spirit just, loving, and humble.

What we need today is a reassertion of the religion of the Spirit. And we may well ask if our present-day Christianity, in its deepest and most forward-facing form, is not closely akin to the religion of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah.

It strikes the note of reality which these men struck. It welcomes all truth. It makes room for the revelations and conclusions of science, not grudgingly, but generously. It faces without fear the issues and tendencies of our own time.

It has a pronounced ethical emphasis. It is

concerned, as religion has not been for many a generation, with Christianity as a "Way of Life," with the ethics of Christ, with the outworking of Christian ideals in practical conduct.

It has the same distrust of outward authority, of professional ecclesiasticism, the same fear of the overwrought influence of form, ritual, tradition, and creed.

We discern in it an emphasis on social justice and human welfare, such as distinguished the message of the great prophets of the eighth century B. C. There is a newly-awakened interest in the Kingdom of God, in the outworking of social justice for all men, in the actualization in social life of those great principles of brotherhood and justice and humaneness which have too long lain dormant save as ideals for individual conduct and relationship.

There is the same emphasis on the universality of true religion; the same eagerness to take in all the world, and to trace God's dealings with all nations, rather than exclusively with a few chosen folk.

And, above all, there is in our modern Chris-

tianity at its best that very reliance on personal religious experience as the decisive element in true religion which is so marked in the men of God of twenty-seven hundred years ago.

Amid all that may seem to many good Christians strange and disturbing about our modern development of Christianity, there are these clear marks of kinship with the religion of the Spirit, at its outset, and down through its history, for which we may well thank God. Nowhere in human history can we trace more surely than here that "one increasing purpose" which runs through all the ages, broadening and deepening the thoughts of men, as they think God's thoughts after Him.

Indeed, some of the very tendencies which are looked at askance by the critics of our modern Christianity—its trust in the living guidance of the Spirit of God, its interest in the social gospel, its passion for vital and present experience, its comparative indifference to the forms and ways of institutionalism, and the like—are the very tendencies that marked these ancient men of God most plainly as representatives of the Living God to their own age and to succeeding ages.

Our evangelical Protestant Christianity, particularly in its more daring, free, and forward-facing forms, has good right to claim that it is the true successor today of those great souls who, beginning with the dawning of the light in the eighth century B. C. have passed on to ever new and growing glory the true religion of the Spirit. It is our high privilege today to stand for that religion of the Spirit as supreme over all other forms and phases of religion, nobler than any and all varieties of ecclesiasticism, traditionalism, sacramentalism, or dogmatism, alone able to conquer unbelief and cynicism, injustice and sin, and to bring in the Kingdom of God.

In so standing for the pure religion of the Spirit, we may be heartily sure that we are one with the great souls of the past, from that dimly distant day when these four great prophets dared declare what God had said to them, down through the long succession of prophets and psalmists, to our Lord and those who have most surely caught His Spirit and taken His way.

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